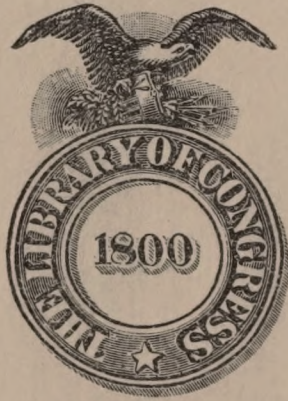


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FATHER KELLY OF THE ROSARY

By
Edward E. Rose

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"THE ROSARY"

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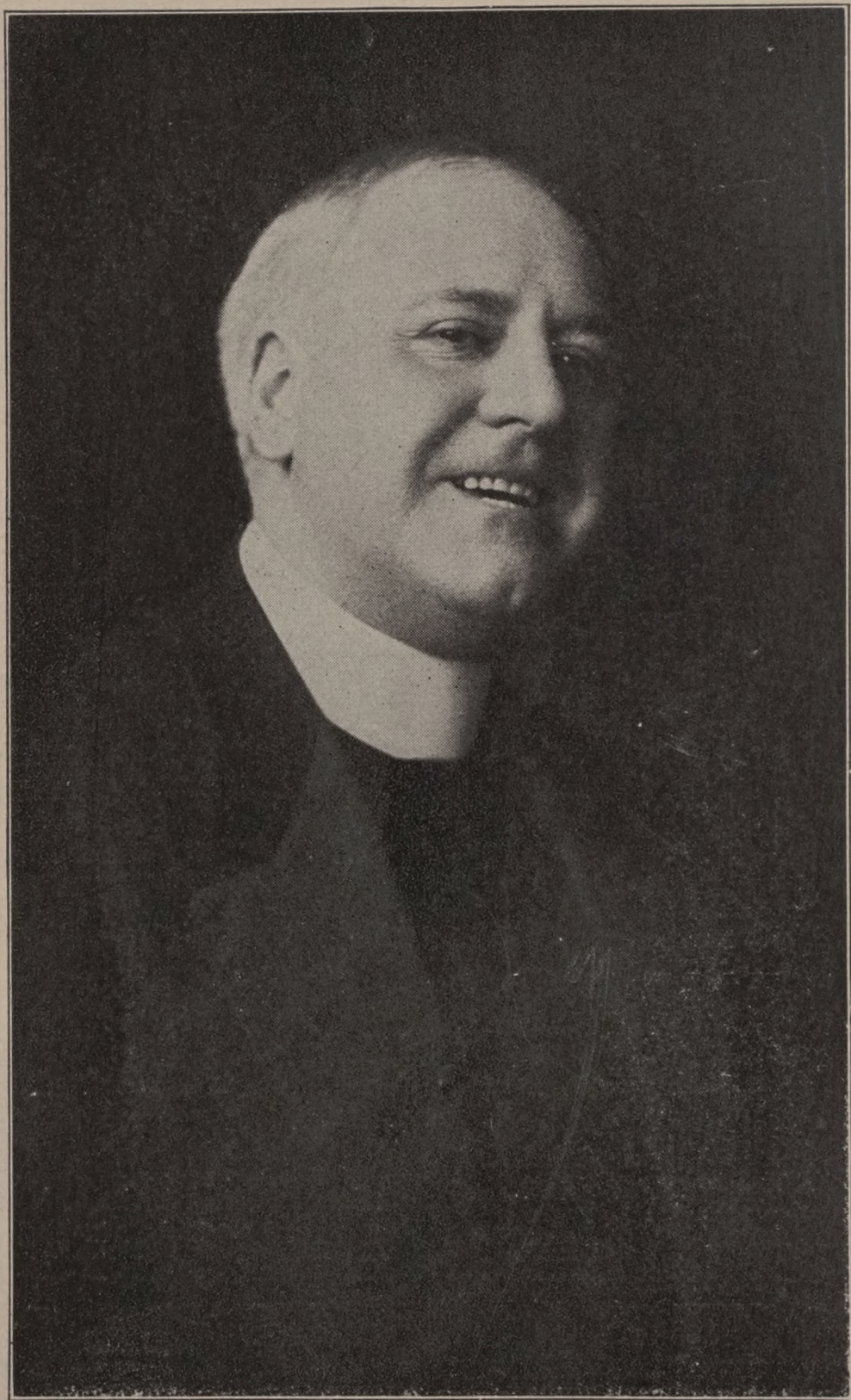
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TO-JESS



FATHER KELLY.

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CHAPTER I

A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

SOMETHING stirred vaguely back in the inner consciousness of Plainclothes Man McCoy, as he passed the point where the little East Side alley joined the almost silent main street of the Bowery.

The sensation was transient, elusive, but, to the educated sense of the thief tracker, it meant—something. Just what, he did not know; he was not expert in psychic analysis.

Warily, he paused and looked about him, then flattened his bulky figure against the rickety board fence, and shifting the half burned cigar to the other corner of his thin lips, tilted his faded derby hat close down over his ferrety eyes and peered distrustfully through the dank mist and darkness.

In the world of crime seekers, nerve contraction means, wait; wait with every faculty alert and prepared—wait.

McCoy waited.

Shimmering mist covered everything; a dull glow here and there showed the positions of street lamps. It was late. A distant city clock, somewhere off in the fog, told the hour with a single stroke, one! Nearer, a train on the elevated set the damp air a-quiver as it sped uptown. The sharp staccato exhaust of a belated taxicab

ploughed a furrow of crescendo-diminuendo sound through the heavy, murky night; then silence again.

McCoy shook his heavy shoulders. In his profession, unexplained sensation meant mystery, mystery meant—perhaps crime. He was puzzled, an unusual occurrence to the most astute mind in the Central Office. He turned away, frowning, gave up trying to fathom the half-defined sensation he had felt; he began to smile at himself. After all it was probably nothing; he had had a hard day, just nervous, that was it and——

A sound came through the night-damp. It was so faint that only the most alert ear could have sensed it, but it stopped McCoy as though an invisible hand were laid upon his shoulder. Not an ordinary sound, he told himself, there was in it a grinding, tearing undertone of force. It was not repeated. The fog seemed to draw closer about him; the stillness to grow more profound.

McCoy pursed his lips to a reflective, inaudible whistle and went slowly, silently down the narrow alley, every sense in him alert.

The slim, crouching figure near the areaway door of the plain brick house at the alley's furthest end, did not hear his light step. One hand held a jimmy, the other was raised to muffle a low chuckle as the sharp eyes surveyed the open door.

"Neat, eh, Skeeter"; it was a faint whisper. "Very neat. Now let's see what's inside."

A gentle push and the door opened wide. Darkness beyond with all sorts of latent dan-

gers; but the rubber soled canvas shoes made no noise as the slender, youthful figure stole inside.

To the cracksman's instinct for scenting plunder is joined another sense quite as useful: the ability to move about in stygian darkness with unerring accuracy. For mental registration, or, perhaps, because he felt the absence of some usual partner in the present expedition, this housebreaker kept up a quiet, mental comment as he moved.

"Yes, it's the kitchen—pipe the stove, lucky, the fire's out. Ah—the cook's rocking chair—and—Gee! nearly had me; that table. Now what the h—? Oh, somebody's slipper—feet like hams. I'd surely hate to have one of 'em cop me. Now—well, what a place to leave a broom! Mrs. Cook, you're fired for that. Yes, and where is the door upstairs? Ah, right under my mitt and I wasn't wise."

Slowly it swung open just enough to allow him to wriggle through. Then the comments went on.

"Nice door. Thank someone for oiling the hinges. Stairs carpeted. Ah! I guess this is bad."

One step at a time, cautiously keeping close to the stair rail—that no loose board might creak an alarm—and the landing was safely reached.

"In the dining room, Skeeter, they keep the plate," he whispered. "All the nice silver spoons, and forks, and knives. Do they want to travel and see the city? Oh, my, yes. Now which door, eh?"

A moment's pause and the massive door on the right swung open a bare ten inches.

"Am I right, or am I dippy?" he asked softly. Then he chuckled; in the darkness his roving hand touched—— "Sideboard? Sure, Skeeter, old boy; feel the knobs and the lock, and——"

The hand stopped in its careful exploration and his head seemed to sink in between his shoulders. Yet there had been no audible sound—nothing had stirred in the silent house, but the instinct of the hunted had whispered to the objective mind and every faculty was at work.

A long minute passed and the crouching form did not move.

Somewhere, in the quiet of the house, a silver clock bell chimed half past one. The musical notes were like shining, trickling streams of sound into the bowl of the room's utter darkness.

Two minutes ticked the slackening pulse beats, and a long, deep breath was drawn.

"Ah-h-h! I'm a fool! Got the willies. Come on now, you sideboard, let's see what you got inside of——"

A flash! The whole, great room became a mass of yellow golden light, as the electric energy leaped through the pressed button at the opposite door and flowed into the carbon filaments of wall and chandelier and table lamps.

With a startled exclamation the burglar leaped to his feet and faced the figure standing quietly in the farther doorway.

It was a man in the dress of a priest.

CHAPTER II

A MOULDER OF MEN

FACE a criminal with danger and he becomes animal; civilization, that result of the mighty upward struggle of humanity, drops from him like some loose garment and in look, in bearing, he returns to the cave man type. It was so now as the housebreaker faced the sudden interrupter of his plans.

It was a calm face that looked at him. The steady gray eyes had that deep, inward peace gained by victory over self, and long years of service to others. Silvery white hair, cut quite in the modern way, covered the head, whose noble outline told of intellect, strength and tenacity.

So they stood, priest and cracksman, the very antipodes of society, and gazed at each other for the space of ten throbbing pulse beats. Then——

“And yet you look like a smart boy!” There was a cadence almost caressing in the calm voice of the priest, and the delicate suggestion of a cultured Irish accent, but so light and shadowy that it gave a charming aroma to his slightest word.

The burglar’s mouth opened in pure amazement. He had expected reproaches, bitter words—anything but the gentle, lingering note of sorrow in the other’s tone. Try as he would he could only stammer:

"Why-I-I-er-I——" Words did not seem to fit easily, just then, into his mental scheme of things.

The priest smiled. Human natures, on whatever plane, were like printed pages to his eye. He had studied life from many angles and knew from the outer indications what was passing within this culprit's mind.

"Yes, you look like a smart boy," he went on calmly. "There's a keen look in your eye; you haven't a bad face. I'd never pick you out in a crowd for anything but a good, honest lad."

He paused a moment as if to give the object of his criticism opportunity to reply. When none came he spoke again, but sharply this time. "Stand up like a man! Don't cringe there against my sideboard! Faith, I can't bear to see a human being groveling. Do you think I'm wishful to bite you? *Stand up!*"

At the second command the boy took a step forward toward the priest. His body sprang erect, his shoulders went back, then a wave of color flooded his pale face. The other looked him over for a moment, then nodded and smiled.

"That's better," he said. "Now, will you please tell me why you look like a clever fellow when you're not one at all?"

"How do you know I ain't clever?" The burglar's confidence was slowly coming back to him.

The priest pursed up his lips, in the manner of one considering a weighty problem, before he replied. "How do I know, eh? Well, look at yourself, then take a mental survey all about

you. Here's a large, bustling, whirling world of these United States—say eighty millions of people. For their own good they make laws. One of these is, in plain language, 'Keep out of a man's house, unless he invites you to call on him.' Wait," he said, as the youth made a movement to reply. "They make this law among others and back it up with unanimous approval. Well, along comes a slip of a lad, barely"—looking him over with a critical eye—"barely nineteen, and he says to himself: 'Oho,' says he, 'but I'm smarter than these eighty odd million and their foolish little law,' he says. 'I won't work and earn an honest living,' he says. 'Why should I? Sure, I'm too bright to be wasting my time in such a humble way. No,' he says, smiling to himself. 'Let the others work, those who haven't my superior ability. As for me,' he says, 'I'll just take my living, sure, and it's only my just due,' he says. And this poor, foolish lad actually tries to do that same with all the world against him."

The burglar shuffled his feet nervously and muttered something inarticulate. Such philosophy as this had never been presented to him.

"Well!" The priest's tone was direct, incisive. "What have you to say to that, eh?"

The housebreaker shook his head slowly.

"Never thought of what you were doing in just that way, did you?" the priest went on. "No, I'll venture to say you never thought at all. 'I'm so very dexterous,' says you, and others like you, 'that they'll never catch me; oh, no, indeed. I can take a man's property, and no one

will ever know I did it.' Come, now, leave out the morality of the thing entirely and look at it on a square business basis. Isn't a fellow who reasons like that a fool?"

The sarcasm and the epithet cut through the burglar's reserve. "But I got in," he said clearly, and there was a note of triumph in his voice. "You locked up and everyone went to bed. 'We're all right,' you said; 'doors locked, burglar alarm set—probably. Oh, yes, we're safe.' But I got inside."

"And what of that?" inquired the priest, unruffled. "I got inside," you say. And you seem disposed to crow like a half-demented young rooster at your wonderful achievement. Well, why shouldn't you get in here, when no door or window is ever locked in my dwelling."

"What's that?"

"You heard me," the priest went on. "Nothing is ever locked in this house." He turned swiftly to the window on his right and threw up the sash.

"Observe, my young and mentally defective friend, what a complete ignoramus you are." He smiled at the bewildered youth. "There's a low shed roof beyond and the convenient ash barrel in the yard below would have saved you a stealthy trip up my stairs in the dark. Tell me, did you bark your shins against the rocking chair in the kitchen? No! I'm sorry. I was hoping it had given you a souvenir or two of this evening's adventure. And will you look here?" He moved across the room to the sideboard and carelessly threw its doors wide open,

showing the gleaming silver it contained. "Unlocked," he observed, smiling quietly. "'So you got in,' did you say? Man alive, the clumsiest hod carrier working on that new building across the street could have done the same thing. So you see there's really no merit in your performance."

He rested one arm on the sideboard and gazed at the marauder with a twinkle in his eye. "And yet, as I think I observed, you look like a smart boy. Ah, surely, looks are mighty deceiving—sometimes."

The burglar took a step forward and there was a hard, almost a dangerous, glitter in his eye. "Suppose," he said huskily, the words seeming to rasp in his throat, "suppose now I am in here, I say I'm not going without something for my trouble? Suppose——"

The priest cut in on his covert threat calmly. "What would I say? Just this—by all means go ahead and make a complete amadhaun of yourself. Fill your pockets with my silver, lad, sure it's there waiting for you. Only, if you love me, leave a knife and fork that I may use at breakfast and don't slam the door when you go out. You might wake my cook and a peevish disposition in the kitchen means a badly prepared meal and indigestion."

He took up a well worn copy of Epictetus from the round mahogany table as he spoke and, seating himself in a roomy, comfortable chair, opened the volume and became oblivious of the intruder.

Silence then in the wide room save for the

ticking of the dainty ormolu clock on the mantel. A cab rumbled by in the street outside, the click of the horse's hoofs beating a rhythmical tattoo upon the pavement. Somewhere off in the East River a tug's siren moaned a warning to other craft afloat at that hour.

"A bluff," muttered the boy to himself and took a step toward the open sideboard. Then something in the steady composure of the black clothed figure sitting quietly in the chair, made him pause. It was not fear. Those of the Underworld who knew Skeeter would have scouted that idea. Many were the instances, related in those subterranean circles, of his cool nerve and superb daring. Yet here, with plunder within his reach, under his hand, almost in his grasp, he hesitated. His eyes, accustomed to appraise booty at a glance, roved over the silver that the yawning sideboard showed.

He moistened his dry lips as he mentally computed what it would bring at Mother Meg's, who ran a "fence" for the real top notchers in the house breaking profession.

One furtive step and his lean hand closed over a box of beautifully engraved spoons. Then he turned his head, in the crook's sidelong fashion, as if half expecting to feel a hand on his shoulder.

The quiet figure in the armchair had not moved. As Skeeter paused and stared, one white, well groomed hand went up to the book's top slowly. A page rustled as it was turned. The calm, gray eyes followed its movement and thoughtfully began on the new leaf's upper line.

Their owner might have been sitting with only his closest and most trusted friend in the room.

The burglar dropped the box with a clatter of heavy silver and brought his clenched hand down on the sideboard's polished top. "By——" he strangled the oath half unconsciously. "I can't! I can't do it!"

The priest turned in his chair with an indulgent smile. "And are you there still, my young and avaricious friend," he said? "Sure, I thought you'd be miles away by this time, maybe, your pockets bulging with my spoons, forks, knives and all."

"I can't do it!" muttered Skeeter again. "Why can't I? You said there they are, go to it! And—and here I stand like a kid out on his first job. Why can't I?"

"Because—you are a smart lad, after all;" and the priest's smile was wonderful in its kindness. He carefully closed his forefinger within the book and held its soft vellum cover to his chin as he studied the boy. "Only," he went on, "you never quite realized that the man who starts out to 'take' his living contrary to the law of the land is lacking in common sense. He's fighting eighty millions of people, and that's just crazy."

Skeeter studied this proposition thoughtfully. He looked down at himself, then slowly about the broad, wainscoted room, as though he saw the mass of humanity he had defied. "Eighty million people," he repeated. "That's a bunch for fair! Crazy?" He nodded and held up his hands. "I fought Tiger Burke," he said; "put

him out in the tenth; gave him ten pounds in weight, too. I thought that was tough odds, but eighty million to one—— Well, your dope is good and you win. I lose out. There's the phone over there. I guess you know what to do. Station 22 is the nearest. Oh, and I'll go nice and quiet. Just tell them you've got 'Skeeter' here and they'll come a-running."

He threw back his head with a smile of boyish pride, for he knew his record—knew the delight there would be among the bluecoats when he was brought in and up to the sergeant's desk. But his face changed to a look of bewildered surprise at the priest's next words.

"If you think you ought to be arrested, my lad, better ring for the police yourself."

"What's that," cried Skeeter? "Listen here; ain't you crowding the mourners? Ain't you rubbing it in?"

"You came in here yourself, didn't you? I wasn't a party to your midnight prowling. Have I mentioned the police? No! Then why ask me to ring the phone? You started all this, didn't you? Yes! Well, then, why don't you finish it?"

Again the new point of view made the boy pause while he examined the proposition. Then he nodded. "All right. I'm game. I'll come across. I never was a quitter."

He crossed the polished floor with a quick, nervous step and picked up the telephone book. "Fine," he murmured, as he turned the leaves. "Old Mac'll be at the desk and he'll let a roar out of him when he sees me that'll turn out the

reserves. 'Who pinched you, Skeeter?' he'll say. 'Nobody,' I hands him back. 'I just grabbed myself to save some of your hard worked cops the trouble.' "

His hand paused on a half turned leaf and his eyes widened. The priest had heard the faint sound, too; he turned to Skeeter. "Did you have company on this little visit to me?" he asked.

Skeeter shook his head blankly. His ears, trained to register the slightest vibration had caught and defined the sound, a stealthy, careful step coming up the stairs.

"I guess I won't have to phone the station after all," he said coolly. "That's a fly cop coming up your stairs. He's seen the open door and the light, and——"

The step was outside, on the landing.

With a swift movement, the priest seized the cap from Skeeter's head and pushed him into a chair facing his own at the table. Almost at the same time he restored the box of silver to its place, closed the sideboard doors, and, seating himself in his armchair, raised his voice in an exposition of a line from the volume of Epictetus in his hand. "So you see, my lad, our ancient and most honorable friend, Epictetus had quite the modern view of man and his duty, when he said——"

The door swung open and Plainclothes Man McCoy stood on the threshold. It had taken some time for him to locate the sound that had halted him, but his face wore a triumphant air.

"Father Kelly——" he began.

"Dear me, is it yourself, Mr. McCoy," cried the priest heartily? And where did you spring from at this hour of the morning?"

"Through your yard, Father, and up your back stairs!" panted McCoy, as he mopped his moist brow, with a not overly clean handkerchief. Then with a burst he told what he felt deserved commendation. "And why did I come? Because, Father Kelly, you have a burglar in your house."

To his utter amazement the priest laughed and wagged his head at him. "Go on out of that, McCoy, and don't be having your jokes with a man of my age."

"But it is the truth, Father—I——"

"Are you serious? Upon my word, I believe you are. See, now, what you say is impossible. 'And why?' says you." The priest smiled blandly. "Because, there's only my little household sound asleep above us, and—oh, you, my young friend here. Yes, and we're deep in a most interesting discussion of Epictetus. Did you ever read him, Mr. McCoy? No! Then you should. Thank you for your kindness and your trouble, but no burglar would ever think of bothering the likes of me, for everyone knows my house stands open night and day and all in it is at the service of any one who stands in need. Must you be going, Mr. McCoy? Good night. Let yourself out the front way. Thank you again. I hope Nora is better. She is! That's fine. Good night!"

As the street door closed on the amazed officer something rose in Skeeter's throat, held

him, gripped him, almost choked him.

He staggered to his feet, clinging dizzily to the table's edge. "Why did you do that?" he asked huskily. "McCoy was right! I am a burglar, a thief, a——"

"You were," said the priest kindly, laying his hand upon the boy's shoulder. "But you're not now. You are a man and a brother."

CHAPTER III)

AT DAYBREAK

WITH head erect and a smile upon his face, Skeeter went down the front steps that led to Father Kelly's house.

Day was breaking. The air was clear and wonderfully cool for the midsummer period. Carts and wagons had begun to rattle over the pavements, some bearing milk, others vegetables—products of mysterious Long Island recesses, home of the truck farmer.

A stout youth, precariously balanced upon a wagon step, measured out a quart of milk to a frowsy, red-haired woman in faded wrapper and down at heel slippers. He nodded blithely to Skeeter as he gathered up his reins and drove slowly away. The woman stopped in her furtive way back to the rickety tenement steps and then grinned amiably.

"Hello, Skeeter," she drawled, her cautious eyes watching both ends of the narrow street. "When did you hit the burg?"

The boy paused and surveyed her a moment before recognition flamed in his eyes. "Well, if it ain't Louve Lou," he laughed.

The woman made a swift gesture of caution and then spoke quickly, her lips barely moving, as is the way with those of the Underworld. "Nix," she muttered. After a wary look up and down the quiet street, she went on: "My name is Mrs. Youngmans."

Skeeter smiled at the air of dignity with which she tried to clothe the words. He took off his cap and bowed. "Mrs. Youngmans!" As he straightened up he asked, "Jim under cover?"

She nodded briefly, and shot a quick look up at the rambling rookery before them. "Fourth floor, number 17, on the door in chalk; better come up, kid, there's something doing."

Half way up the steps she paused; something in the boy's manner made her turn and look at him curiously.

Association, habit, made Skeeter take one step to follow her. The next instant he flung himself around on his heel with an angry exclamation.

"Come on," said the woman. "This is a job worth while; it's a cleanup."

Skeeter shook his head. "No," he said, slowly. "I've turned square, Lou!"

"You've what?"

"Turned square!"

"Since when?"

"About two hours ago."

The woman laughed, noiselessly, as all the crooked fraternity learn to do. Just a quick opening of the mouth, a sudden inhalation of air, a twinkle in the eye, then the same expression of reserve and caution.

"Two hours ago, eh," she repeated. "Say, Bo, I'll expect you back in two hours more ready for work!"

"You won't see me, Lou," and there was finality of decision in the boy's firm tone. "This is on the level and it goes!"

She gave a contemptuous flirt with her head, then paused and looked at him with narrowing eyes. "Suppose you'll blow, Mr. Square Guy. On your way to Headquarters now?"

"Stop that, Lou!" He came to the foot of the rickety steps and looked up at her. "Say, do you suppose I'll ever forget that time you and Jim took me in when I was down and out, sick, and "*wanted*," out in little, old windy Chi? Do I look like that kind? 'Turned square,' I says, and that goes, but I'd do a ten-year bit and never holler before I'd squeal on you or Jim!"

The woman looked at him carefully for a moment, and relented. A half smile stole over her face. Over the low shed, on the street's opposite side, the first streaks of dawn lighted her face and figure, touching it softly, gently, as a painter might his loved work. The new light brought out the firm contour of her not uncomely face; it made clear a curious, new look, almost wistful, longing, far back in her dull eyes. The street was quite deserted still and she risked another minute.

"What turned you square?"

"A man, Lou!"

"A man? Say that's funny; it's usually a skirt."

"No, a man, a priest."

"A what?"

"A priest, Lou! No, I ain't kidding. I mean it; a priest. I broke into his crib and he caught me, had me dead to rights and buffaloed. Then he let me go. I just been talking to him, and,

Lou, do you know what he told me? What you want, you get."

"Say that again, Skeeter!"

"'What you want, you get,' that's what he said, Lou; and he ought to know. 'Why, there ain't no such thing as luck in this world,' he said. 'You get what you want, if you only want it hard enough, and—and keep on wanting it.'"

"Are you stringing me, Kid?"

"Do I look as though I was, Lou?"

"No, you don't! There's something strange about you. I piped it the minute I put my lamps on you."

"What?" he asked a little anxiously

"Don't know," she responded slowly, studying him with the close scrutiny of those whose wits are eternally pitted against society. "It's a different look about you somehow. Thought at first you'd made a big stake——"

"I have, Lou; I've got next to myself."

They eyed each other in silence for a long moment, then a window banged noisily above them.

The woman gave a startled look toward the upper story of the tenement. "That's Jim," she said hurriedly. "Yes, I must go. He'll think I'm pinched or ducked and left him."

Skeeter gripped her hand hard. "Tell Jim," he said earnestly, "tell him not to be a fool a minute longer; don't let him, Lou; there's nothing in the crooked game for anyone. You and Jim are fighting eighty millions of people, figure out what chance you've got. Good-bye." The

door closed noiselessly upon her and the boy went up the little side street to the main artery of the East Side.

It was broad day now and the roaring tide of busy city life was rising steadily with every minute as it passed. Dull, inert, sleeping, the town had been during the ebb hours of darkness, but now, with the dawn of a new day upon it, with the summer sun sending down volleys of warm and quickening beams, there was life, activity, movement, noise and bustle on every side. In the thoroughfare of the Bowery a ceaseless stream of wagons, drays, cabs, automobiles, electric cars, vans flowed ceaselessly on and on. Hucksters, with wagons backed to the curb, cried their manifold wares with shrill, insistent cries; itinerant peddlers, laden with every article needed by human beings, pushed their goods persuasively into the faces of the passers-by; here and there, the sinuous forms of Chinamen slunk furtively through the mass of humanity; eyes half closed, hands buried in capacious sleeves, silent, inscrutable; the age old, calm civilization of the Orient jostled by the modern feverish hurry.

And through it all there rang in Skeeter's brain the phrase repeated to him by Father Kelly. "What you want, you will get—what you want, you will get."

He said the words over and over to himself, repeated them thoughtfully, anxiously, questioningly, and when he stopped the half mechanical repetition, still he heard them. It seemed to him they were drummed by his heels upon the side-

walk; he thought he heard them in a great diapason of overtones in the deep notes of the Bowery.

"I wonder if it is really so?" he said to himself, as he paused under an arch of the elevated. "What you want, you will get, eh? Well, Bo, I want—money! Oh, not a big wad, just a quiet piece of coin, and——"

He stopped short his communing with wonder in his eyes, for his right hand, carelessly thrust into his jacket pocket, had found—something, down in the further corner. Slowly he drew out his closed hand, opened it and looked.

It was a five dollar bill.

He ran it through his fingers, staring hard at it, almost doubting his eyes. It was a new five dollar bill, crackling pleasantly and companionably to his touch and pinned to one corner was a tiny strip of paper with words traced on it in a fine copper plate hand.

"Don't forget, dear lad!"

A great wave of feeling swept over the boy's consciousness. He stood silent, apart from that hurrying throng, back in the eddy under the elevated arch. Emotion had been a stranger to him until now. The hard life of the streets, the furtive eye, the stealthy step, the sidelong appraisement of possible plunder, the annexing of this and the hasty flight, all these things he knew; but kindness, helping hands, save that once from Jim and Lou; words of affection, any interest in him, his ways or life, beyond the mere cupidity of a partner now and then, had never entered his narrow, squalid existence. He

drew a deep, long, shuddering breath and felt once more something that gripped him. Then his face softened as he looked down at the note, and lines of resolution showed upon his face.

Father Kelly had sown his seed at a venture, but it had taken firm root. The better self of the boy was awakened now. It sat erect in the saddle of his consciousness, held the reins and would direct the future course; the objective self that had so long misguided was in subjection and yielded absolutely.

"Gee," said Skeeter softly. He dashed his coat sleeve hastily across his eyes; any display of real feeling on the Bowery always draws a curious crowd. So moving onward with the throng northward for perhaps the space of two city blocks, he turned aside into a quieter street, for he wanted time and space to think. One novel impression had followed another so quickly that he was wearied with the flood of sensations.

"What you want, you will get!" The words seemed to shape themselves into the phrase now without his conscious effort. At last, half in answer to their ceaseless refrain, he spoke the thought in his mind. "Well, I want a job, and I want it bad."

He had paused almost in the middle of a crossing as he said the words.

Two sharp, explosive toots of a horn, the grinding of brakes, suddenly and powerfully applied, sounded directly behind him. He turned to find a long, low, rakish automobile within a scant yard of him.

"When you have another day dream, or go into a trance, young man, never choose a street crossing; it is a bad habit."

It was a cheery, manly face that looked at him over the hood of the auto. Black hair, athletic shoulders, eyes that looked straight at everybody and everything as they had looked for over thirty years. The voice had a vibrant quality of health, good humor.

Skeeter began a confused apology for his heedlessness, but the other cut him short with a laugh.

"All right," he said, as he leaped from the car, of which he was the sole occupant, and took a firm hold on the starting crank, for his motor was dead. "All right, old man. Thank your lucky stars that it is a new car and that my chauffeur left me two days ago. If he had been driving, well, you'd have been on your way to the hospital now—or kingdom come," and he gave a quick heave at the crank.

No explosion followed in the cylinders. Again and again he renewed the muscular effort, but with no result.

Skeeter expected an explosion of wrath with himself as the storm center, but none came. He stepped forward from the sidewalk and spoke a little timidly to the man.

"Mind if I try to start her, Mister?"

"Mind," replied the perspiring owner. "Mind? Young man, this crank is all your own. I'll just sit down quietly and watch you work." He perched upon a hydrant nearby, lighted a cigarette and fanned himself with his leather cap. "Go as far as you can!"

In the unwritten pages of Skeeter's life, there were paragraphs of motor history that the police would have eagerly devoured, and acted upon the information therein contained with promptitude and dispatch. The experience was of value to him now, however darkly it had been gained; steadily and thoroughly he went over the car.

"Crawl under it," chaffed the owner from his hydrant seat. "Oh, please crawl under it. I would like to see someone besides myself in that idiotic position. Go on; be a good fellow and crawl under it!"

But Skeeter shook his head gravely. Then his hand located the trouble; a quick turn of the handle and the six cylinders leaped into vibrant, throbbing life. Gently he drew back the spark lever and closed the throttle, until the loud roar of the motor faded to a gentle, caressing purr of contentment, then he turned to the owner, who had watched his skillful manipulation, with an observant eye.

"Guess you're all right now," he said. "She's a peach all right. Sorry I stalled you and thank you for not hitting me."

"All right," replied the autoist, as he took his seat, and then, with his hand on the low speed lever, he paused. "What's your name," he inquired.

"Ske——" began the boy, and then checked himself sharply. No, he was going straight now. He was done with that crooked name. But so unused was he to his own that it took a moment for him to quicken recollection. "Lee Martin!"

he answered at last and felt with a thrill of satisfaction that he was looking straight into the kindly eyes of the questioner.

"Lee Martin," repeated the man. "Well, mine's Bruce Wilton; here's my card. You'll excuse me, but you look as though you wanted a job. Drop around!" The clutch gripped easily, the car moved on the first speed, then, with a whirr of the wheels it was gone.

Lee Martin stood looking after it, the small bit of white cardboard in his hand.

"What you want, you will get," he said slowly. "Gee!"

CHAPTER IV

A MORNING IN WALL STREET

JOHN EVARTS, general manager for Bruce Wilton, stood discreetly aside as his employer came through the outer office with a rush, as though to make up for the time he had lost. Evarts was a tall, pallid individual with parchment skin and a cold blue eye. He might have been any age to the observer, but his close friends had heard him admit, with his peculiar dry cough and a nervous twirl at the sparse goatee on his nether lip, that he had passed fifty.

"Yes, Evarts, I know I'm late," said Wilton as he tossed his leather cap into a corner and deftly slipped out of his linen duster. "Only don't scold, old man, not my fault. Thank you, Ike," to the Hebraic office boy who obligingly hung up the coat and rescued the cap from a waste paper basket where it had fallen. "Thank you and skip. Now, Evarts," as the door closed on the boy, "half an hour before the Exchange opens, we'll talk quick. Any news?"

Evarts twirled his goatee thoughtfully and took a step nearer Bruce.

"Iowa Central," he said slowly with an apologetic cough.

"Yes, well," Wilton leaned back in his desk chair and eyed his manager.

"Have you seen the tape, Mr. Wilton?" nodded Bruce.

"Yes. Just a flash on my way in from Westchester; 64, eh?"

Evarts nodded. His long prehensile fingers took a new hold on the scanty goatee and he leaned over the ornate mahogany desk.

"Mr. Wilton," he said slowly; "I've bought and sold on the Exchange floor for you five years. I've never questioned you once in that time. But now I want to ask one thing." He paused and drew a deep breath. "Do you know exactly what you are doing?"

Bruce leaned back in his comfortable chair and laughed.

"Upon my word, Evarts, you are human after all. You know I'd begun to think you were a fish—no blood in your veins—but now—well, I swear, you old ruffian, I really believe you're worried about me."

Evarts did not smile. He nodded grimly.

"I am," he said, "because—well, it seems to me you're taking awful chances. You don't know—no one knows—the exact issue of Iowa Central stock. Legal complications, juggling of the books, make it impossible for anyone to know exactly."

He paused and ran a lean forefinger over his thin lips.

"And so I say," he went on, "go slow."

"All right, Evarts," laughed Bruce; "we'll go just this slow. Grab every share you can track to its lair. I figure that a thousand more gives me control, then we'll let the papers have the news and you'll see it climb—soar—like an aeroplane with ninety horsepower behind it; only," and his voice grew grave, "not a word—not a whisper."

Evarts drew back from the desk sharply. "Mr. Wilton," he said. In the tone there was a hint of gentle reproof.

"Oh, I know, I know, Evarts. The Sphinx in Egypt is a babbling phonograph compared to you, but be careful. You know there has been a leak in this office."

His manager nodded slowly.

"Yes," he replied, "and a bad one."

Bruce clipped the end from a cigar viciously.

"Cost me twenty thousand dollars, and the worst of it is, we've never been able to trace the dark skinned gentleman who was concealed in that particular woodpile."

"That's why I say now go slow," said Evarts.

"Don't worry," laughed Bruce genially; "we'll hope the Ethiopian is satisfied with the harm he did us that time. Only not a whisper about Iowa Central. I haven't told Vera even."

There was a cadence of gentleness in his voice as he spoke the name, a lingering tenderness quite out of place in a sordid stock broker's office.

Evarts took a step nearer and his thin lips came as near a smile as their straight lines would permit.

"Mrs. Wilton is well, I hope?" he asked.

"Well and beautiful, and so charming that sometimes I look at her and wonder why she allows me about the house. Two years married, Evarts, and not even the suspicion of a discordant note." He rose from his chair and paced the length of the office, his fingers tearing open a letter he had taken from his desk.

"I tell you, old man, it was a lucky day for me when I went West three years ago, and you, you old villain, tried to keep me from taking the trip."

"I didn't know, Mr. Wilton, that you would meet Mrs. W."

"That's as near a humorous remark as I ever knew you to make; why, you——"

He stopped suddenly and looked searchingly at the open letter in his hand.

Evarts had taken a discreet step toward the outer office, when Wilton's voice stopped him.

"Evarts," he said, "make a memo that I'll want seventy-five thousand dollars next Tuesday."

His manager methodically noted the amount and date in a well worn book.

"Of course, you wouldn't ask what it's for," laughed Bruce. "Was curiosity left out of your composition?"

"I'd hardly presume, Mr. Wilton," began Evarts, but Bruce cut him short.

"I'll tell you anyhow. It's to build a chapel."

Evarts' pencil paused in the middle of a word and he almost gasped.

"A what?" he stammered.

His employer leaned against his desk and laughed.

"Why, you old scout," he roared, clapping the astonished Evarts on the shoulder, "you are human, after all. That gasp proves it. Yes, I'm going to build a chapel."

"Where?" asked the astonished manager.

"See," returned Bruce, "see, you're growing

more human every minute. That's the first time you ever asked a question from curiosity. Where? Out in Westchester."

"But I thought—that is—I——"

"You thought! You know, I'm not a believer in religion. I'm a materialist. Soul, spirit, they're just words to me. I'm here, Bruce Wilton, alive, doing business, trying to be decent, living and letting others live. Some day when life goes out it's all over—no more Bruce Wilton. Yes——" he went on seeing the question in the other's eyes, "but this is sentiment. I'm building this chapel for two reasons. One," he held up a finger to emphasize his point, "Vera, she does believe, bless her; two, there's an old friend of mine, my tutor when I entered Yale. A great man, Evarts, a big man, though he doesn't suspect it. I've found him out and the chapel is for him. Here's a letter from the Archbishop of New York, giving me permission to build this chapel. Here are the plans. Put Williams on them at once. Better get bids in next week. Now, off you go, Evarts, and get me on the wire if anything new turns up."

"Let's see, now," said Bruce when the door had closed on his manager. He turned to his stenographer and dictated busily for twenty minutes. Those who knew him complained that Bruce Wilton never really worked, he simply ran at it and threw it out of his way.

A timid knock sounded on the solid oaken door, just as his secretary tucked her pencil into some mysterious recess of her back hair and rose to go.

"Ah," said Wilton, as the door swung open in response to his sharp, "Come," and he saw his friend of the street crossing standing there.

"You didn't waste any time, did you?"

"I didn't have any to waste," replied the boy.

"All right, Miss Marvin," and as the stenographer departed with a backward look at the visitor, Wilton turned and subjected him to a long scrutiny.

"Will I do?" asked Skeeter quietly?

"Knew I was sizing you up, eh?"

"I thought you couldn't be studying the cut of my clothes," replied Skeeter slowly.

Wilton laughed and clapped the boy on the shoulder.

"Yes, I think you'll fit in where I mean to put you. That's out in Westchester, my country place, just moved and things are in seventeen different kinds of a tangle. Know the roads about here?"

Skeeter nodded, his eyes following every movement of the man before him.

"All right, then, you hop into my car——" The phone on the desk rang sharply and Wilton caught it up, sitting easily on the corner near him.

"Yes," he said, and then with the same peculiar softening of his tone, "That you, Vera? How do I know? You don't suppose any old phone wire could disguise your blessed voice so I wouldn't know. What. Oh, Charley's arrived, eh? Glad of that. Looks bad? Sorry. We'll cheer him up. And say, dear, your new chauffeur will be right out——Who? Why——" He put

his hand over the mouthpiece and smiled at Skeeter. "Listen, now, Kid. I'm going to send a description of you over the wire to your new mistress."

He dropped his hand and went on smiling amiably at the boy.

"Well, he's about nineteen; not a beauty, but a good face. Yes, I nearly ran over him this morning. That's how I met him. Sending him out with the car. Could he call for—what's her name? Lesura! Good Lord, is that hayseed really coming? I beg your pardon. Of course, he can. This kid can do anything. Good-bye, dear. I'll be out on the 4:10. Yes, good-bye."

He hung up the receiver as though he broke the electrical connection with regret, then turned briskly to Skeeter.

"Well, kid, you're on; twenty-five a week and here's your directions to get there."

He rapidly penciled a few lines on a card and handed it to the boy.

"And, oh—I nearly forgot. Stop, on your way, at the Grand Central and pick up Miss Lesura Watkins, from Bellows Falls, Vermont."

"Miss who?" asked Skeeter, undecided whether this was a joke from his new employer or some trial of his adaptability.

Wilton laughed.

"Lesura Watkins, isn't that a name to make you smile? She's a girl from Vermont," he went on. "Up where Mrs. Wilton passed the most of last summer. Coming down now to, well, work for Mrs. W. It's one of her experi-

ments—the kind she's always making. Train's due at 12:10; better be on your way."

Skeeter paused, with the knob of the door in his hand. Here was a chance, but was he sure of himself; ought he to take this position without——

Wilton's voice broke into his meditations sharply, but not unkindly.

"What is it, kid?" he asked.

The boy turned and put his back against the door. He clutched his cap in his right hand.

"Mr. Wilton," he said slowly and evenly. "It is mighty good of you, but there's one thing you ought to know. I've been a crook."

It was said now and he felt better. He drew a long deep breath and waited.

"Ah," said Wilton slowly. Then he leaned back in his chair and lighted a fresh cigar.

"My dear fellow," he went on, "I take long chances every day in my business, one more or one less doesn't matter. I'm going to take a chance on you now. What you have been doesn't interest me; what you are does, and I'm gambling that you're par value and a gilt edged security. On your way."

Skeeter made no protestations—something seemed to keep him from doing so. Wilton's tone was bracing; there was life and human feeling in it. The boy nodded, already he understood this big fellow who enjoyed life and the things that were to be done.

"This young lady," he asked, "how'll I know her?"

Wilton smiled over the big cigar.

"Well," he said, "just meet that train and pick a short, round girl, with a wondering stare and a Bellows Falls, Vermont, look in her eyes; don't forget the name—Lesura Watkins—and in Heaven's name get the right one. She's the most serious, the saddest thing that ever hit New York. If you make her laugh you get a prize. Off with you!"

A bob of the head and Skeeter was gone.

Wilton smoked reflectively for a moment, then knocked the ash from his cigar and smiled.

"Been a crook, eh? But stands up, looks you in the eye, and, by George, goes after a girl he has never seen without questioning; just salutes and goes after it. Ah, somehow I think that kid will make good."

CHAPTER V

THE GIRL FROM BELLOWS FALLS

AS he brought the long, low, racy looking car to rest before the Grand Central Station, Skeeter was conscious of a curious elation of feeling.

"Gee," he said, as he shut off the power and climbed to the pavement. "Gee, it sure does make a feller feel good to turn square."

He found himself whistling a popular air of the vaudeville theaters and stopped in blank surprise; whistling had been a lost art with him. Then his errand in the station came to him and he smiled.

"And I'm to find a girl I never saw, pipe that; and take her to Westchester; wouldn't that send you to your low speed?"

It was the noon hour when the agile and fretful commuter was already in the city, and the huge station was deserted, save for a few scattering groups bound on longer journeys.

Skeeter looked at the train sheet, saw the Vermont express was scheduled as on time, and so made his way out to the numbered gate where it might be expected. The day was growing more sultry, and the trainmen showed it in their lack lustre eyes and languid movements. Little knots of people came through the swinging doors that led to the main waiting room. A fast express for the far West was pulling out amid the merry shouts of a party of young people,

who showered rice and old shoes upon a handsome young fellow and a charming girl, as they stood on the observation platform of a brass-railed and over-decorated private car.

Somehow the world looked bright to Skeeter.

He waved his cap to the vanishing wedding couple, then became amused at himself.

"I'm trying to break into society," he said with a laugh.

Someone touched him lightly on the shoulder and he turned quickly. It had always held a nameless terror for him in the old days.

"Mr. Martin, isn't it?" said a pleasant voice with a friendly ring.

The boy looked up quickly and found Father Kelly facing him with a smile.

"Of course, if I'm wrong," said the priest chuckling quietly, "sure I'll apologize, but you bear a close resemblance to Mr. Lee Martin, a friend of mine."

Skeeter caught the muscular hand extended him and shook it vigorously.

"You bet I'm Lee Martin and that friend stuff goes double, Father Kelly, and, say, your dope was all right on that wanting thing. Thank you for the five spot. Say, I got a job, too!"

"Well, well, you don't tell me?" Father Kelly's voice was vibrant with hearty friendliness. "I'm on my way to my new quarters," he added. "There's no church. I have to preach in a tent. Tell me, do you think the New Yorks can beat that piratical crowd from the smoky confines of Pittsburg today?"

"Gee, are you a fan?" asked Skeeter in as-

tonishment. A clergyman to him had always meant gloom and sighs, talks of a sulphurous future and dire warnings of wrath and punishment.

Father Kelly laughed heartily. It was good to see him; his whole nature seemed to expand and enter into the joy of the moment.

"My boy," he said, "I'm worse than that; I'm the manager of the Walla Walla's on the East Side. When my boys played the Cherry Hills and Beffy Evans was on third, two out and the score a tie, faith, I had to hold on to myself or I'd have gone straight up into the zenith like a comet or a new kind of airship."

"I thought you lived on the East Side," said Skeeter.

"Well, lad, I was stationed there for five years and when I was ordered to my open air parish, as I call it, the boys and girls set up a hullabaloo. Faith, you'd have thought the peace of the United States was threatened. So to prevent riot and bloodshed," he winked gravely at Skeeter; "I come in every now and then and keep my old quarters here in town."

"And sometimes late callers keep you up all night, don't they, Father Kelly?" The boy asked the question a little shamefaced in manner. He was thinking of the night just passed and all it meant to him. It had just dawned on him that a sleepless night might mean fatigue and loss of nervous force in a man of sixty.

Father Kelly laughed and clapped his friend on the shoulder.

"Late or early, 'tis all the same, and when

they come very late and stay long, sure, I'm all the happier, for it means one more friend in this old world; and friends—well—you can't have too many of them. Aha, there's my train." He backed away from Skeeter toward the gate and waved his hand.

"Come out and see me," he cried; "the place is Westchester," and he vanished down the long platform.

"That's funny," said Skeeter; and then everything but his immediate duty was swept from his mind as he heard the megaphone of the trainman announce the arrival of the "Vermont express, track seventeen."

He pushed his way through the little throng of people gathered about the gate.

"No," he thought, "I won't stand right close to the entrance, for then I'll only get one flash at this bunch. Me for that long distance thing and the eagle eye."

So he took his stand facing the coming crowd from the newly arrived train, where each passenger must face him as they came up the platform.

It was the usual medley of personalities that came from the train. There was the nervous man unused to traveling, a little bemused by the noises of the big city; the excited woman who looked upon the journey as an emotional tragedy and felt in her heart that John wouldn't be there to meet her; the shy Miss greeted tenderly and somewhat over decorously by the callow youth; the plain wife and mother, struggling with a baby in arms and two children

clinging furtively to her skirts; the slick traveling salesman, half of whose existence was spent on trains; the small town merchant, the modern young woman, the athletic college man, all were there, and all came through the gateway smiling or frowning, nervous or calm, perspiring or cool.

Skeeter looked them over with a calmly appraising eye and shook his head.

"Nothing like a Rube there," he muttered. "Not in skirts, anyway."

He stood a moment longer, until the last stray passenger had departed and the platform was deserted; until the guard was closing the heavy iron gate.

"Did I get this train wrong?" he asked the guard, a stolid, heavy faced man with heavy shoulders and a broad, red face. "Was it the Vermont express?"

"Sure thing," growled the guard and gave another pull at the refractory gate.

The boy turned away, and then gave a last look down the deserted platform.

Some one was descending the steps of the last passenger coach. Skeeter saw first the hem of a light dress, then a foot, and a girl swung herself to the platform.

She was rather undersized and given to a not unpleasing plumpness. Her face, round and expansive, held an expression of absolute calm. The hat of straw was trimmed with a collection of flowers that nature in her wildest moments never conceived. A long linen duster covered her completely, and one sturdy hand grasped a carpet sack.

Skeeter gave one look and paused.

"Bellows Falls," he said; "Bellows Falls or I'm an Indian in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show."

The girl made her way slowly toward the gate. There was deliberation in her every step. She seemed to put one foot down and to consider carefully the next step before she took it. Confronted by the closed gate she paused. There was no change in her expression, she merely stopped and gave her mind to this new problem.

The guard moved forward and laid his hand on the gate.

"Want to get through?" he asked with a half yawn. Skeeter stood discreetly aside.

The girl nodded; evidently she believed in the economy of speech.

As the heavy gate rolled back she walked through, her eyes steadily looking straight ahead.

"Miss," said the guard, waggishly. "You're much obliged aren't you?"

Skeeter grinned appreciatively and the guard was satisfied; someone had laughed at his joke. He closed the gate and leaned on it, watching the retreating form of the girl, then a sudden thought struck him.

"Darned if that guy ain't going to speak to her. Well, what do you know about that?"

"I guess there's only one way to do this," said Skeeter, reflectively, as he followed the billowing linen duster and the carpet sack. "Jump right at it."

And he did. As the girl paused at the station's entrance, Skeeter took off his cap and came near her.

"Miss Watkins?" he said with a bow that surprised himself.

The girl stopped short, then turned and surveyed him calmly. The silence was portentous; it made the boy nervous and he hastened to add quickly, "Miss Lesura Watkins—isn't it?"

A long pause and the girl did not speak or move.

Skeeter shuffled from one foot to the other under the steady, unwinking gaze. Then he ventured again, somewhat more timidly:

"Miss Lesura Watkins of Bellows Falls, Vermont?"

The girl broke her silence at last. She took a step away from him, gripped her carpet bag tighter and said very distinctly:

"Police!"

"W-what!" faltered Skeeter.

"Police," said the girl in a somewhat higher tone.

"Hush," said Skeeter, visions of all sorts of fearful happenings going through his mind. "Wait, hold on! What are you calling the police for?"

"Because," replied the girl, with no trace of anger or any other emotion in her face, "my pa said to me when I left Bellows Falls, he said, 'Lesura, when you get to New York, if any feller comes up and speaks to you, call the police.'"

"Yes," returned Skeeter, humbly, "but I——"

"'Never mind if the feller knows your name,' " the girl went on, "'and all your relations; never mind if he has been to Bellows Falls, knows the postmaster and used to live up on the hill. Call the police; that's the only way. Call the police, or you'll come home with another gold brick to add to my collection. I've been to New York three times and I know.' "

She paused, drew a deep breath and, regarding Skeeter with a steady, unwinking stare, called again:

"Police!"

"Hold on," said Skeeter. "Don't do that yet. Wait a minute."

"My pa said," replied the girl, "'the longer you wait, the more dangerous it gets in New York!' Police!"

Skeeter saw a well remembered blue uniform pushing its way through the crowded sidewalk, its occupant glancing from side to side as though uncertain of the exact location of the call for aid, and knew he must act quickly.

"Listen here," he said, "you got me wrong. No, wait! See, here's a card from Mr. Wilton, Mr. Bruce Wilton. See, there's his automobile. I'm to take you out to his place—to Mrs. Wilton. Mrs. Vera and—— Say, wake up, I'm talking to you."

And then seeing in the close approach of the blue coat a necessity for prompt action, Skeeter manfully seized her by the arm and bundled her into the tonneau. He slammed the door on her, cranked his engine and, throwing in his speed lever, was off up Forty-second Street and into

Fifth Avenue at a pace that drove traffic drivers to loud profanity.

The next fifteen minutes were claimed by the car, for it was the crush hour on New York's showiest avenue. Everything on wheels was out, from the plodding one-horse rig to the four-in-hand. A steady stream of vehicles passed and repassed each other; the clatter of hoofs, tooting of horns, shouts from the drivers to unwary pedestrians combined to rack the nerves of the inexperienced. Perspiring policemen at the crossings waved their huge white gloves, blew whistles and in various other ways combined to make the racket more bewildering.

Skeeter gave very little thought to his passenger, every nerve was alert to steer his car through the tangled mass; but when Fifty-ninth Street was safely passed, he pushed back his cap with a sigh of relief and stole a hurried look behind him.

Miss Lesura Watkins had not moved. She sat rigid, clasping her faded carpet bag close to her side, while on her face was a look of utter vacancy.

Skeeter shook his head over the steering wheel. The ways of femininity were always strange to him, but the present example simply bewildered him.

"She nearly gets me pinched for a bunko man," he muttered; "makes me kidnap her to get her away and now goes into a trance, or is she asleep, I wonder?"

Another glance backward convinced him that his charge was wide awake; there was no sleep

visible in the round, unwinking stare with which she surveyed him and the landscape.

They were out in the country now. Brick walls had given place to charming cottages; well kept lawns; leafy groves. Sultry though the day had turned out to be, there was a cool breeze which tempered the heat. Now and then, through breaks in the wall of cottages, could be seen the Hudson thronged with pleasure craft of all kinds and sizes, for this was a gala day of some sort on the river. Skeeter, with Bruce Wilton's card of directions on the steering wheel, felt a love of life and the day spring up within him until it overflowed in a whistle of sheer good fellowship.

"Mister?"

The sound was so faint that at first the boy doubted if his ears were not playing him some trick. No, for it came again; this time somewhat louder and more insistent.

"Please, Mister?"

"Yes," replied Skeeter; "yes, ma'am."

"If you please, could I ride on the front seat? I'm all alone here and some one might crawl up behind; my pa said I'd have to be awful careful in New York."

Skeeter grinned, but replied instantly.

"Sure; on the front seat, why not?" And throwing out his clutch he brought the car to a stop with its engine throbbing rhythmically.

Lesura climbed out of the tonneau and laboriously and seriously mounted to the seat beside that of the driver. She still clutched her carpet bag, and though Skeeter put out his hand to help

her with it, she drew back and shook her head soberly.

"I don't know you well enough yet," she said stolidly.

Skeeter smiled at this as being a good joke, but there was no answering response from Lesura.

"Excuse me," he said, as he threw in his clutch and the car moved on. "That wasn't my hand, no; it was just a dream!"

Lesura studied this effort at a pleasantry as she did everything, with a tremendously serious expression.

"A day like this," said Skeeter, feeling the need of conversation, "just makes you feel good all over. Smell the flowers, and see the kids playing, rolling in the grass, and that brook gurgling, and the good old sun just shining down on us all and laughing because he's happy to see us all doing well. Makes a fellow want to yell, don't you think so?"

"You can't dream in the daytime," replied Lesura. "Can you?"

"What's that?" And Skeeter nearly shied the car off the road with the start he gave at this unexpected answer.

"You can't dream in the daytime, can you?"

"You can't—say, please what is this? What are you handing me, Miss Watkins?"

"What you said."

"I said?"

"Yes, Mister. I thought you put your hand out to help me and I said——"

"Ah, I see, you've been doping out the remark I made."

Lesura stared. "Can you dream in the daytime?"

"Sure you can. Why, down at Sheepshead, when the ponies are running, every one dreams. Yes, indeed, Miss Watkins; dreams he knows which pony it is, and then ting-a-ling-ting-a-ling-ling-lingy! That's a correct imitation of an alarm clock—and the dreamer wakes up. Yes, and walks home."

Skeeter threw back his head and laughed with keen enjoyment of his own joke. He turned to observe the smile he felt at least was his due from Lesura.

None came; her face gazed blankly at him.

In his lighter moments, with money in his pockets and no besetting fear of the police to vex him, Skeeter was known as good company. He had a quaint, half serious way of saying absurd things that never failed to raise a laugh. The unwinking, serious stare with which Lesura favored his comic effort made him feel uncomfortable.

Evidently she concentrated the full power of her mind upon what he had said, for lines of mental effort appeared between her eyes.

"Why should they dream when the ponies are running?" she asked. "And why should any one set an alarm if the ponies are running? Seems to me the hired man was careless to let the ponies run and then go to sleep, and if any one let the ponies run, why he ought to walk home; but what was he sleeping for away from home, and whose ponies were they?"

She paused a moment for breath and then went on.

"Now, if the ponies——"

"Nix," gasped Skeeter, in his excitement narrowly missing a lamp post and bringing the car back into the road with a jerk. "Nix! Don't hand me any more; can't you see I'm out?"

Dead silence ensued. Lesura was considering this new point of view.

"Why, yes," she ventured. "We're both out, aren't we?" And she allowed her eyes to wander slowly up at the blue sky and then at the hedgerows on each side of the smooth, well oiled roadway.

"Help!" It was all Skeeter could say.

"How?" she replied, instantly turning to him.

Skeeter bent over his wheel and laughed. He knew now that he was dealing with rustic innocence and a matter of fact mind.

"You'll be the death of me," he said, soberly.

"Not if I know it," Lesura returned quite anxiously.

"Yes you will be. Much more of this and I'll die." And then Bruce Wilton's words came back to Skeeter. "If you make her laugh you get a prize." He grinned appreciatively. "The boss knew what he was stacking me up against," he said half aloud.

And meanwhile the road was leading them on and on, forever disclosing new beauties.

Houses were farther apart now, were larger, more ornate. Some towered high with minarets and cupolas; others spread a huge bulk over the greensward. It was as though each

owner had tried to outdo his neighbor in odd design and costly finish. "Homes of the nouveau riche," the keen observer would have said and added a cross index of further information as to the sources of the money supply. Pork here, chewing gum there, a patent biscuit to be met with on every luncheon table, or a pink pill warranted to cure all ills.

Skeeter's mind, not given to subtle analysis, merely placed them all in one common category, "a bunch with money to burn."

And now the road rising almost imperceptibly by easy grades ran along the brow of a hill overlooking the Hudson. Soon, obeying his card, he made a sharp turn to the right and coasted down a gentle rise through a little village. Just beyond were heavy iron gates and wrought high up in heavy letters appeared the name of the place, "Eden."

Skeeter threw out his clutch and sat looking up at the single word.

"This is the place," he said. Then he drew a deep breath and read the word once more, "Eden."

CHAPTER VI

WITHIN THE GATES OF EDEN

THE tall, handsome man, puffing lazily at a cigarette in the loggia of Bruce Wilton's country place, sprang to his feet as he heard the swish of silken skirts in the hall.

"Knew it was you, Kenward," laughed Vera Wilton as she came forward with her hand out frankly.

He looked down at her, as he took her hand, from his superior four inches in height and laughed.

"Mind reading or telepathy?" he queried.

"Neither; just common sense. 'Gentleman to see you; wouldn't give his name.' That's what Lesura said. Now there's really only one gentleman who pops in on us like that, and his name is Kenward Wright." She perched herself on the loggia's marble railing and laughed at him through a spray of roses.

It was late in the summer afternoon, and the westering sun's rays filtered through the riot of vines and roses, bathing her figure in a soft amber light.

Kenward took a step backward and smiled.

"I wish," he said, slowly, "I were a painter chap, Vera. I'd put you imperishably upon canvas just as you are now."

Vera laughed heartily. "Bruce is always making threats of canvassing me, but I tell him the poor artist would have a task. You know I

never could sit still long enough. How did you happen to drop in on us, and is your descent to be a long one and—oh, dear, tell me all about it.”

Kenward drew a deep armchair nearer and sat loosely on its arm. He was tall and fair, the direct antithesis of Bruce Wilton. In his tone there was always a dull, metallic ring as though the words responded to some inner vibration.

“There isn’t much to tell,” he replied, smiling up at Vera’s alert, eager face. “I just happened to be in town with a little time to spare, and thought I’d look you up. Haven’t seen you since you became Mrs. Bruce Wilton, have I?”

“No,” said Vera, thoughtfully, “You didn’t come to our wedding, Kenward.”

He shook his head and felt for his cigarette case.

“Why, Kenward?”

The smoking tray was on a small, low table on the opposite side of the loggia. Kenward rose and took a match deliberately from the silver holder.

“Hate weddings,” he said as the flame caught the end of his cigarette.

“Not my wedding, Ken!”

He paused and looked at her over the flaming bit of wood.

“All weddings.” He tossed the match away and came nearer. “Lot of fuss and bother,” he went on. “Bridesmaids, silly lot; best man, always in a blue funk; crowd of idiotic people staring; wedding march; flowers and—then afterwards—reception, wedding breakfast and, oh,

Lord, what not! Much better to say to the girl: 'Will you have me?' 'Yes.' 'All right, I'll have you.' Go away, and say, yes, we're married."

Vera swung herself around on the coping and gasped.

"You anarchist," she said. "You destroyer of all our institutions. Don't you know that a girl's wedding is *the* event in her life?"

"Events, plural," he corrected her grimly.

"Wretch!" she replied, detaching a rose and striking him with it lightly on the cheek.

"It's rarely singular in these degenerate days, Vera."

"Now, I don't admit that at all."

"I know, but you've only been married two years."

"Cynic," was her answer, and then she slipped from the coping and her tone changed. "Bruce and I both thought, Kenward," she said, nervously. "Well, I hardly know how to say it, but we thought perhaps, when Uncle Archer died and left Bruce all his fortune—we didn't know—perhaps you felt——" She broke off lamely and picked a petal from the rose in her hand.

Kenward looked down at her and smiled. "Don't ever let that worry you," he said. "Uncle Archer was Bruce's uncle; he was no kin of mine. Took a sort of fancy to me, helped me through Yale. There wasn't any reason why he should leave me anything but that odd thousand. Besides," his voice took a deeper tone and he looked away from Vera, down the hill that led to the iron gate across to the blue Hudson,

"Bruce had already won you; money didn't matter."

Vera laughed and stood on tiptoe to put the rose she held in his coat.

"You will keep up that ridiculous joke, Kenward, that you cared for me."

He turned away with a grim smile and his left hand touched the rose in his coat as he said:

"Yes, it is funny, isn't it?"

"But you haven't told me where you came from, Ken." She smoothed the pillows on a low couch and dropped down on them. "And you know you must have dropped from somewhere."

"Well, this time my drop is from the West."

"Where—what state?" She leaned forward expectantly.

"Melbourne, Iowa," he smiled into her eager face.

She made a quick movement, but he forestalled her question.

"Yes, I saw your sister; what a start she gave me. For a moment I thought it was you."

Vera looked at him in a puzzled way; something in Kenward's manner started a train of questions in her mind, but she checked it resolutely as she replied:

"Why, we are twins; you knew that, Kenward."

He came a step nearer, then swung abruptly on his heel and puffed at his cigarette as he said:

"Of course, but—well, meeting her suddenly was something of a shock."

There was a pause, broken only by the soft sigh of the wind among the roses, and the steady whirr of the locusts. Vera had turned away and was gazing steadily toward the hills on the opposite river bank. A tender look stole over her face.

"How was Alice?" she asked, dreamily.

"Quite well, I should judge."

"I haven't heard from her in quite two months."

He lighted another cigarette and tossed the burned stub away carefully before he answered. "Letter writing is a bore, Vera. I always wonder when I pick up Walpole's letters, or the bulky volumes that contain the correspondence of our great men, how they ever had the patience to do it."

She went on as though she had not heard his last words.

"Ken, I've a curious feeling of depression about Alice."

"Nonsense," he laughed.

"No, it's not," she persisted. "You know we were left alone, just father and we two mites. Mother didn't seem to thrive out there; she was from New England, and the silence, the sense of being remote, cut off from everybody, seemed to chill her. She just faded away. Afterwards Alice and I did the best we could, but life didn't mean much to father after mother went away."

Her voice faltered a little and she rose and paced thoughtfully toward the other side of the loggia.

"But Alice was so ambitious. How she

worked to fit herself for teaching, and how I worked on my voice. Why, Kenward, I meant to startle the musical world."

"And then Bruce came," he put in quietly.

She turned with a laugh, and a smile drove all the shadows from her face.

"Yes! And a musical career——" she snapped her fingers gaily.

"Worth just that, was it, compared with Bruce?" he asked with a gesture like her own?

"And no more," she added, making him a charming courtesy.

He looked at her gravely and decided mentally she was everything a man could desire. Intelligence, sympathy, power of understanding and quick feeling shone in her liquid brown eyes. Charm she possessed, vitality, and, above all, that quality so rare in a woman—comradeship. The faculty of viewing life and conduct from a broad standard.

Unconscious of his mental appraisal, Vera had strolled to the end of the loggia, where broad marble steps led down to a trellis screened arbor.

She turned to him now and made a little gesture of cautious invitation.

"What is it?" he asked, as he joined her.

She laughed silently up at him and pointed to two figures below, busily engaged in arranging a tea table.

"My chaffeur and butler and general handy man, Martin; and the girl? Oh, she came to me from Bellows Falls, Vermont. They've been with us two weeks. I don't know what to call

her. She isn't a maid exactly. Listen! It's awfully good fun. Martin's been offered a prize by Bruce if he can make Lesura laugh."

"Lesura; is that a name, Vera, or an affliction?"

"It's a name, of course, her name; listen."

Lesura had climbed to a garden bench. A newspaper caught to the trellised roof by some vagrant wind eddy luring her; and Skeeter paused as he laid the latest magazine upon a low tabouret and grinned up at her amiably.

"Ah, there angel," he said, with an Eastern salaam, and then, as Lesura made no reply, he went on as though in earnest conversation with some shadowy, invisible companion:

"How dare you speak to the angel, Skeeter? I'm surprised at you—nay, shocked. Does she wish to converse with you? Nay, nay, and likewise nit." He paused for a moment and stole a glance at the girl on the bench. She stood helpless, regarding him with a big, round eyed stare. He sighed at this evidence of her lack of humorous response and went on.

"Nice angel!" He turned and whistled softly, calling, "Rover, Rover, Rover."

Here at last was something Lesura could understand. She leaned forward and searched the trellised arbor with her wondering stare.

"What are you calling a dog for," she asked, "when you know Mrs. Wilton hasn't any dog."

"Well," replied Skeeter, dropping into a rustic armchair and mopping his brow thoughtfully, "I've tried everything I know to make you talk since that day I drove you out here two weeks

ago, and I said today: call the dog and she will spoken from the face out forwards, and you did. Wise boy, Mr. Martin. I guess yes."

Lesura surveyed him with unsmiling solemnity. She shook her head gravely as she asked, "Are you crazy?"

"Are you, Lee?" cried Vera, leaning forward on the top step of the loggia, her hand on Kenward's arm, her face dimpled with laughter. "Are you?"

"No, Mrs. Wilton," returned the boy as he made her a low bow. "No, I'm only just a little bit daffy."

Vera threw back her head and laughed. It was good to hear her. The cadence of her mirth sent back all kinds of harmonious echoes, and the flowers seemed to nod in sympathy with her enjoyment.

"Thank you, Mrs. Wilton." Skeeter bowed profoundly.

Kenward chuckled quietly.

"The lady on the bench doesn't seem to appreciate your humor."

Skeeter looked up into Lesura's mournful face and sighed.

"Don't I know it, Mr. Wright," he replied, "and yet they call me the original comedy cut-up around here."

Lesura's eyes opened a trifle wider and she gazed at the boy with a new interest.

"What do you cut up, Mr. Martin?"

Skeeter dropped back helplessly in the chair, while the echoes rang again with Vera's laughter and Kenward's hearty mirth.

"Can you beat her?" cried the boy in a tone of anguish. "Can you, oh, can you?"

"What are you doing on that bench?" asked Vera when she could control her voice.

Lesura gazed about her helplessly.

"I don't know, Mis' Wilton," she replied.

"Take your time," groaned Skeeter. "Don't overburden your mind; don't try to force it."

"Ah," cried Lesura, suddenly.

"Quiet, everybody." Skeeter was on his feet, his hands outspread. "Quiet, she has an idea."

"I climbed up here to get that paper."

Skeeter darted from his chair around the table and with a flying leap dexterously rescued the newspaper from the trellis. Ignoring Lesura's outstretched hand, he tucked it under his arm and ran over to the foot of the marble stairs.

"Extra! extra!" he called loudly, "all about the missing heiress of Bellows Falls, Vermont; please buy a paper lady." He held it out to Vera beseechingly, but she shook her head laughingly and pointed to Lesura, who was staring at him in amazement.

With one bound Skeeter was at the end of the bench. He spread his arms wide and with an entire change of manner became the dignified policeman of the Broadway squad.

"Keep back there," he called loudly; "keep back, give the lady a chance."

"What are you doing now?" asked Lesura gravely.

"Keeping the crowd back so you can get out of your airship."

Lesura descended from the bench slowly and heavily, her mind busy with this new idea.

"Look out for the trolley car," called Skeeter, and with one vigorous movement he swung the girl behind the table and bowed to her gravely. "Saved your life, Miss, but don't thank me. I have ten medals at home for bravery."

"I don't see any trolley car." Lesura gazed at him earnestly; she was trying hard to fathom the idea back of all this.

"You don't? Dear me!" Skeeter strolled over to her grandly and flicked an imaginary bit of dust from her plump shoulder. "See, there it goes, all painted red and green." He eyed her earnestly. "Especially green; and don't you see the sign: this car for the Joke Hospital, corner of Ha Ha avenue and Tee Hee street."

He looked at her smiling broadly, but his expression changed to one of acute pain as she replied sadly:

"I don't see any car, and I never heard of a Joke Hospital."

"You'll never win that prize," put in Vera from the top of the stairs.

"Sometimes I feel that way, too, Miss Wilton," returned Skeeter, mopping his face. "And that isn't the worst of it. You see, I have a bet of five dollars with John, the coachman, another of two with Molly, the cook, that I can make her laugh."

"Got your work ahead of you," laughed Kenward.

The word work stirred the strings of Lesura's remembrance.

"So have I," she said, and immediately turned to her duties, arranging the little tea table, disposing the cushions and laying out cigarettes from a curiously inlaid box upon a silver tray.

Skeeter motioned for silence to Vera and Kenward. He came up three steps and lowered his voice to a cautious whisper.

"Excuse me," he said, "but here's the idea. Maybe my jokes are too wise for her. Now I'm going to try something simple."

He stole down the steps and moved over to Lesura.

"Ah," he said, smiling blandly, "getting everything ready for Mr. Wilton, eh?"

"Yes, Mr. Martin, you know he always comes on that five o'clock train."

Skeeter looked up at the blue sky and stifled a society yawn.

"I wonder if Ben will come with him today?"

Lesura paused in the act of lighting a silver spirit lamp, and considered this as she did everything, with methodical care. Vera laid her hand on Kenward's arm and her eyes questioned him.

Kenward smiled and motioned her to silence.

The mental effort brought nothing to Lesura. She shook her head and questioned the boy.

"Ben who, Mr. Martin?"

Modest in what he believed was his hour of victory, Skeeter took a step forward and smiled as he answered.

"Why, Ben-anna!"

He waited, and his smile faded, for Lesura was considering his reply with all seriousness.

"I never saw Mr. Benanna out here."

"Stung," said Skeeter, and he vanished around the corner of the house.

Lesura made a courtesy to Vera, and started after him. Then she paused, vibrant with an idea.

"Mrs. Wilton," she said, twisting the corner of her apron nervously; "shall I put an extra cup on the tray when I bring it for—for—Mr. Benanna?"

Vera stifled a laugh in her handkerchief. "No, Lesura, for I don't think Mr. Benanna will visit us today."

Again Lesura courtesied and took a step toward the little covered walk which ran back of the house.

"The water's boiling for the tea, Mrs. Wilton, and I'll come just as soon as I hear the whistle blow for the five o'clock train."

She gave one more careful look at the tea table and disappeared around the corner of the house.

Vera turned with a smile and saw Kenward's eyes fixed on her.

"What is it, Ken?" she forestalled him.

Kenward started slightly and looked at her narrowly.

"How did you know I was asking a question of myself about you, Vera?"

"Saw it in your eyes!"

"Have to be careful what I think when you are watching me."

"Well, you were going to ask me something?"

"I will, anyhow. Do you treat all your servants as you treat those two young people?"

"Why, yes; like friends."

"Odd idea, isn't it?"

"I don't see why?"

"Don't they ever presume?"

Vera shook her head. "No; and you know I don't like to hear anyone call them servants."

"You socialist!" he laughed.

"Whatever you will, Ken." Then her manner changed and she came swiftly toward him, with outstretched hands. "Oh, Ken!"

"What is it now?"

"I've just thought of something."

"That an unusual occurrence with you?"

She made a little gesture of reproof for this levity on his part. He chose to take it as a threat of physical violence and fled smiling behind the tea table.

"Don't joke, Ken," she persisted. "It is simply providential, your dropping in on me like this."

He lifted the little silver lamp from the tray and lighted a fresh cigarette, eyeing her quizzically.

"Going to commit some crime?"

She shook her head brightly, and came a step nearer, laying her finger on her lip.

"No, Ken; but tomorrow is the anniversary of my marriage, and I've a present for Bruce, one that I want you to help me give him."

Kenward stared at her blankly. "A present you want me to help you give Bruce? Say, Vera, how am I to help? Ah, you want me to hold Bruce while you make him take it, eh?"

"Don't be ridiculous," she frowned. "You speak as though it was a dose of particularly unpleasant medicine."

"Well, just how am I to help, then?"

"I'll tell you—tomorrow. Meet me in Bruce's study early."

"Ah, now you make me anxious, suspicious, when you say early. How early?"

"Well, six o'clock!"

"Good Lord! I'll have to sit up all night to make it. Better enlist the aid of the milkman!"

"Please be serious. Bruce won't go to his office, probably, and it's a task to have this gift ready for him and keep him out of the way."

"It must be an amazing present!"

"That's exactly what it is. I think he'll wonder when he sees it." She paused and sighed a little. "You know, Ken, there's only one thing about Bruce I'd change."

"Only one," he chuckled. "Most wives have a catalogue of additions and elisions, after two years of married life, that would fill an octavo volume."

He saw she did not smile, and drew a little nearer.

"You know Bruce. Well,—he doesn't believe in—well, in anything."

"An infidel, you mean, Vera."

"Yes; only somehow the word always jars on me. Oh, I know you'll say that science has quite disposed of old religious beliefs, turned them into myths and fables; but somehow I cling to the old, sweet faith in an all-wise, all-loving Creator, a Father, our Father, who watches over us and guides us, rejoices at our victories and is hurt by our transgressions. Bruce doesn't believe, and sometime's I'm—I'm afraid, Ken."

Her voice sank almost to a whisper, and she put her hand over her eyes.

"Vera," he said softly, and came very near to her.

"You'll say it's rank superstition, Ken; but I think of those solemn words of Him who walked this earth as a man, tasted its joys and sorrows, and died as we all must some day: 'He that believeth not shall be'——" She shut her lips tightly, and then threw it from her with a gesture of dismissal.

"Foolish? Of course I am, Ken. Morbid? Yes, I presume that's it. Only sometimes I wonder if the power that sways our world, all worlds; that keeps the stars in their courses and causes the sun to shine, may not teach the man I love the lesson of Faith, by bringing him to the dust, humbling him through sorrow and misery."

Kenward stood looking at her, awed by the deep tone of conviction. The Sun's rays, nearly level now, dappled the rug-strewn marble floor of the trellised arbor. One slender shaft of golden light fell upon Vera, bathing her face and rapt eyes in its lambent glow.

"You might be some ancient priestess," he said softly, "standing before the sacrificial altar; or an oracle speaking from the incense mist about your tripod. But you don't really believe that?"

"I hope I'm not," she replied, a little wearily.

"I hope I may prove a false prophetess. But I try so hard to have faith for both of us, and to lead Bruce; and this gift is to help him in that way."

Kenward shook his head, more than ever mystified. His blank stare changed her mood to one of gaiety.

"There, there, Ken," she cried gaily; "what gloomy thoughts for such a perfect afternoon! I know you'll help me, so that's settled; and now here's another commission for you."

"Going to keep me busy, eh?" he laughed, responding easily to her lighter tone. "Well, give it a name. Is this another leap in the dark at six A. M.?"

"No," she smiled, sitting on the arm of the carved settee and leaning toward him. "This is very simple; just cheer Charley up!"

"Cheer Charley up?"

"Don't echo me, Ken, in that parrot way, and don't be stupid. Charley Harrow, my cousin."

"Oh," said Kenward, nodding, as memory came to his aid. "The young fellow with more money than——"

"Kenward!"

"I wasn't going to say brains; you wrong me. 'Sense' was the word I meant to use."

"Oh, Charley has sense enough, Ken; and it wasn't his fault that his father left him ridiculously wealthy."

"Two hundred thousand, wasn't it?"

Vera nodded.

"Fancy it's being necessary to cheer a man up with that amount of money at his command! Just what seems to ail him?"

"I don't know; nobody knows. He was up in the Catskills. Suddenly he appears here. We were glad to see him, of course. But he won't

talk, nor eat; really, I don't believe he sleeps; just sits around and smokes and sighs."

"Why, he used to be the life of the party," said Kenward, reminiscently.

"Well, he isn't now, Ken; he's simply a horrid problem, so you cheer him up."

"On the whole," remarked Kenward, smiling, "the early morning job you've promised me is rather more inviting. You know it's a difficult matter to cheer a fellow up when——"

He broke off abruptly and rose from his chair. Vera's eyes followed his intent gaze down the latticed walk which led to the main drive.

A young girl was approaching them rather timidly.

CHAPTER VII

THE HOME IN EDEN

VERA turned, with a hasty exclamation, and then smiled charmingly at the intruder. "I beg your pardon," she said. Then in a swift feminine way she inventoried the newcomer. Age about eighteen; pretty in a sweet, girlish way; medium height; red bronze hair that glowed in the sunbeams; simply but charmingly gowned in a way that showed a splendid, supple figure.

"I beg your pardon," she repeated lightly.

"And I beg yours, ma'am; so we're even." There was just a lingering touch of Irish brogue; a soft, throaty accent, as though her progenitors had breathed the foggy air of the misgoverned and misused little island. She looked into Vera's eyes, and evidently found warmth and friendliness there, for she smiled radiantly.

"Did you wish to see anyone?" asked Vera. She was hardly at her ease.

Kenward was standing by his chair and looking at her rather boldly.

"Is this Mr. Wilton's place, ma'am?"

"Why, yes," returned Vera; "and I am Mrs. Wilton."

"Are you?" She treated Vera to a prolonged look of wonderment. "Look at that, now! I've been making up my mind you were an angel, and you look"—her blue eyes opened widely and

she took a timid step nearer—"you look human."

"Your first thought was the correct one," put in Kenward, gravely. "Angel is the word; she's going to take flight in just two minutes."

"Kenward!" admonished Vera severely. Then she turned to the young girl and smiled. "Why did you think I was an——"

"Angel? Because I've heard of all the fine things you've done for the Poles and the Scandinavians who are working on the new aqueduct."

"A missionary, are you, Vera?" laughed Kenward.

Vera made a gesture of silence to him as she asked, "And what can I do for you, dear?"

"Just ask one of your servants to step inside the house and tell Father Kelly that his niece, Kathleen O'Connor, is waiting for him in this beautiful garden." She moved away from Vera and looked about her over the well-kept beds, the flowering banks of roses, and the smooth terraces.

Vera stole a look of wonderment at Kenward, who stood frankly amused at her perplexity.

"But Father Kelly isn't here, my dear girl," said Vera gently.

"No," she said, turning. "Do you know who I mean, Mrs. Wilton?"

Vera smiled and nodded. "Everyone knows Father Kelly." She turned to Kenward in explanation. "He's the dear old priest who came out here among the poor people and holds services for them in a tent."

"He's my uncle," said Kathleen, proudly.

"Really," cried Vera, in surprise. "I'm so glad to meet you. This is Mr. Kenward Wright, Mr. Wilton's friend and mine."

Kenward bowed, and Kathleen returned him a little old-fashioned courtesy. Then she moved nearer Vera. "And are you sure Father Kelly isn't here?"

"Why, yes; did he say he was coming?"

Kathleen nodded, a puzzled look in her eyes. "This morning, when he went out to make his rounds of the parish, he called me to him, and says he, 'Kathleen, do you mark the fine house on the hill?' 'I do,' says I. 'Well,' he says, 'if anyone calls I'll be there toward five in the afternoon. It's Mr. Wilton's house,' he says, 'and Mr. Wilton has sent me a note asking me to call.'" She paused, with an air of finality, and regarded Vera gravely.

Kenward returned Vera's mystified look with a shake of his head; he was unable to solve the problem.

"Mr. Wilton sent Father Kelly a note," repeated Vera blankly.

"So Father Kelly said," nodded Kathleen; "and, ma'am, he couldn't say anything but the truth if you paid him for it."

Vera took the temporizing course. Bruce would arrive shortly, and, besides, she remembered dimly the high amusement with which he had written a mysterious note the evening before in his study, boyishly teasing her by saying it was a secret communication of great seriousness.

"Then I'll tell you what, dear," she said, twining her arm about Kathleen; "come into the house with me and wait. Mr. Wilton will be here soon, and Father Kelly may have been delayed."

Kathleen looked up into Vera's eyes, read there friendliness, and shyly put her arm about the waist of her hostess.

"Ken," said Vera over her shoulder as the two moved toward the house steps, "you find Charley; he's somewhere about."

Kenward, who had been watching the little feminine comedy with a smile, gave a hurried look about the expansive garden. A white flanneled figure caught his eye on the second terrace.

"I see him," he cried; and, parting the vines, he waved his hand to the youth, who came slowly up and across the smoothly shaven terrace to meet him.

The two figures, silhouetted against the white marble steps leading to the loggia, had nearly reached the top.

"It's been a hot, dusty walk," Vera was saying; "you must be very tired."

"A little, Mrs. Wilton; but then, sure the longest walk is worth the trouble, just to see you."

"I subscribe to that, Miss O'Connor," put in Kenward from the foot of the stairs.

Vera waved her hand gaily to him as she disappeared with her guest.

A dull sparkle of light showed in Kenward's eyes; as though some hidden emotion were suddenly aroused; some vagrant thought that touched the hidden springs of feeling. There was forever about him an air of reticence. Full and hearty response seemed impossible to his nature. Yet good feeling, frankness, amiability showed always in his face and actions. It was

only when one tried to find the inner man that something seemed to close, almost as though a door were shut upon an intruder.

"Hello, Ken," said a voice tinged with a subtle melancholy, close behind him, and he turned slowly.

"Why, Charley, you old Indian!" he cried heartily, as he saw who his interrogator was. "It's a wonder you wouldn't come and say hello to a fellow, without my yelling at you."

Charley moved slowly to Kenward and gave him a limp hand. His rather slim figure seemed to exude melancholy.

"Didn't know you were here." He walked away towards the tea table, then turned and added, with a mournful sigh, "Awfully glad to see you."

Kenward smiled, then looked his young friend over with a puzzled but appraising eye. Charley was somewhat over the average height; sinewy rather than muscular; a face not fully developed, but promising no particular strength; dark hair, rather long and something too curly for a thoroughly masculine head.

"Idealist!" jotted Kenward mentally; "head in the rarefied upper atmosphere—but rather a good-looking chap." He added aloud as he sauntered over to him, "Yes, I noticed you were just crazy about me. How are you, old man?"

"Rotten, thanks."

"What's the matter?" Kenward was really concerned.

Charley shook his head slowly and shoved his

hands deep into his pockets. "Just bored, you know."

"Bored!" echoed Kenward.

"Tired!"

"Tired; of what?"

"Everything!" He shuffled his feet nervously and waved one hand in a circle about him. "You see all this?"

"Yes."

"Fine, you think; top notch of luxury, eh?"

"Beautiful."

Charley shoved his hand deep in his pocket again, and kicked at a corner of the rug before the little tea table. "Rotten!" he said, with a deep breath of utter disgust.

"Come, I say, Charley——"

"You think it's a fine day, Kenward, don't you?"

Kenward looked about him enthusiastically. "Beautiful! charming weather; the air up here has an absolutely tonic quality, and——"

"It will rain tomorrow," finished Charley, gloomily.

Kenward frowned. He was not used to having thoughts twisted from his own meaning.

"You're in a nice, amiable frame of mind, aren't you?" he almost snapped.

Charley shook his head slowly and sighed. "My normal condition now." He looked about him dejectedly. "Got a cigarette, Ken?"

"Just going to offer you one." His case was in his hands with the words, and he extended it hospitably. "New kind, Charley; make you feel better. , Finest blend of Turkish, mild, fragrant——"

Charley dropped the white tube he had taken back in the case.

"Rotten!" he said. It was as though he abandoned all hope now.

Kenward closed the case with an angry snap. "What in the devil's name ails you, Charley?" He hurled the question at him viciously, hoping to change the mood of oppression.

"Life's a joke," said Charley, regarding him as though delivering an aphorism of depth and weight. "A poor joke badly told by a bad jester."

"Must have taken you a long time to look up that wise reflection," returned Kenward, satirically. "Come now, brace up; have you been here all Summer?"

To his utter astonishment, Charley's face expanded into a friendly smile. "No," he said, with a laugh; "I was up in the Catskill Mountains four weeks."

Kenward took a step back from the young man and stared in sheer amazement at the sudden transformation.

"Yes," he said feebly. "Why—you—you look happy when you say that?"

Gloom was seated on Charley's countenance once more.

"I was happy," he growled, "for four weeks; but now——" He moved away toward a leafy arch that led to a path running up through the grove of birch saplings. "Now everything is painful to me." And while Kenward stood glaring at him, too dumfounded to move, he ran up the path and turned. "You give me a pain."

With this Parthian shot he vanished in the thicket.

Kenward caught up a leather-covered settee pillow. Physical violence seemed to fit the case rather than argument or persuasion; but Vera's voice from the loggia halted him.

"Oh, Kenward," she was saying as she came down the stairs. "Martin has your trunks up. I've given you the room at the other end of the wing. You'll be quite by yourself, as I know you always want to be——" She stopped and looked about her, then at Kenward. "Did you see Charley?"

"I did," replied Kenward tersely, tossing the pillow regretfully back in its place, "and if you're wise, Vera, you'll keep that youngster out of my way."

"Did you cheer him up, Ken?"

"I did not; but for two cents, two lonely copper cents, I'd punch his empty head."

Kenward vanished up the steps of the loggia, through it and the hall beyond to his room, shown thither by a servant who waited for him.

"Poor Kenward!" laughed Vera, leaning against one of the vine-covered trellis supports. When by the vicious opening of his window she knew he was in his room, she ran up the little embankment back of the arbor. Kenward's angry eyes met hers as he leaned out to fasten back a loosened shutter. A pause, and then they both laughed.

"Was he very trying?—Charley, I mean, Ken."

"Trying? No, he doesn't try you; just makes you mad clear through. Is he like that all the time?"

"Yes—gloomy; talks of how peaceful the silent tomb must be; gloats over D'Annunzio's 'Triumph of Death,' bur-r-r——." She shuddered extravagantly, and he laughed.

"What time do we dine, Vera?" he asked, after a pause in which he drank in the beauty of the gradually closing day, and was not unmindful of the charming picture she made as she leaned against a gnarled and twisted oak tree.

"About seven. Hungry, Ken?"

He looked at her quietly for a moment, then dropped on his knees before the open window and folded his strong arms upon the sill.

"Yes," he said.

She made a little "moue" at him and shook her finger admonishingly. "Do you good to wait."

"Dress?" he inquired as she turned to go.

She paused and nodded up at him brightly. "And I'm glad you're here, Ken."

"So am I," he replied, as she dexterously steadied herself with one hand on the oak, and then ran down the little rise to the arbor.

A faint whistle cut clearly through the quiet of the dying day. Vera paused, panting a little from her headlong descent, and listened intently. Two sharp staccato blasts came floating up to her through the heavy, blossom-perfumed air, then one long musical note.

She clapped her hands, and various echoes of intense activity sounded in the house. "Lee, Lesura!" she called, and was answered by quick footsteps on the graveled path that led to the kitchen. Skeeter appeared, running swiftly; in his hands a tray on which was a silver tea urn,

swung by a chain above a spirit lamp. He turned the corner of the house deftly and reached the tea table in two swift steps.

"On the job, Mrs. Wilton," he said. "I started when the whistle blew."

A match flamed in his hands, and the spirit lamp was soon blazing.

Vera looked about her nervously. It was her pride to have everything ready for this afternoon tea when Bruce arrived.

"Oh, dear," she complained; "where is Lesura?"

Lee was putting the last touch to the table. He knew from experience just how it must look to win a smile and a pat on his shoulder from the lady it was his joy to serve. "Bellows Falls is asleep, I guess," he ventured, with a smile.

Vera struck the bell upon the table a single sharp note. The sound filtered through the boy's consciousness like quicksilver. He moved toward the centre of the little open space; body half bent, his left arm out, his right arm drawn back close to his body. That one bell, like some magician's wand, had changed everything. The Summer wind, whispering among the leaves, was the murmur of thousands crowded close within the confines of a smoky, high-raftered hall; the soft, sibilant purr of the steaming kettle was the voice whispering advice close behind him; the one in front of him—was—was——

"Lee!" It was Vera's voice, very low and quiet. He dropped his hands and looked about him in a dazed way, then he smiled ruefully.

"Sorry, Mrs. Wilton, but that one bell made me think I was back in the prize ring again."

"Oh, Lee," reproached Vera. "I thought you were through with all those dreadful days, long ago."

"So I am; only at times, and then—why, it just gets me. But I won't again; honest, I won't!"

His voice rang with simple honesty, and Vera patted him gently on the shoulder.

"Go and find Lesura," she said, gently.

"You bet," cried the boy, in relief, and turned in his quick, nervous way for a sudden flight down the narrow path.

Only his quickness of mind, eye, body, prevented a collision; for Lesura was right behind him, a tray of frail china in her hands, her face set in an expression of stern achievement, and her feet making what her native town would have called "sudden haste."

Deftly, as Vera uttered a low cry, Lee sprang to one side, and, to save himself from rolling down the terrace, embraced the startled Lesura, who stood still, the tray extended in her hands, and in her eyes profound amazement.

"Don't worry," panted Lee to Vera, and then, as he possessed himself of the tray, Lesura still standing with her arms and hands extended, brought his sense of humor back to him.

"Going down," he said, and with one hand forced Lesura's arms to her sides.

Then he regarded her critically. There was not even a faint gleam of answering humor in her eyes; she gazed at him, round-eyed, soberly.

"You ought to get the hook," he said; and, smiling at Vera's laughter, rested the tray upon

the table and disposed the cups in their usual places.

"Mr. Wright doesn't want any tea. I just went up to see and he said to tell you no, thank you, Mrs. Wilton."

Lesura had not moved. In the constantly recurring shock of new impressions, here was a novel and a far stranger one.

"Get the hook."

To her literal mind it meant exactly what the words conveyed. In her existence a hook was a hook. There was nothing to tell her of its more occult meaning, gleaned from the vaudeville theatres, where on amateur nights, when eager and budding artists are given a trial, disapprobation on the part of the audience causes the offending performer to be dragged from the stage by an iron hook about his waist, the motive power furnished by a muscular stage hand.

"All ready, Mrs. Wilton," said Lee, regarding the table with a critical eye. "A close call on cups and cake, but it got here finally on the Bellows Falls slow freight!"

"Mr. Martin?" called Lesura, twisting her fingers nervously together.

He assumed an elaborate air of attention and leaned toward her.

"What kind of a hook shall I get?"

He dropped upon the settee and stared at her; then the real understanding of the query dawned on him, and he chuckled.

Vera had only half heard this little side comedy. She was listening for the sound of a step that even after two years never failed to

thrill her, to send the blood pounding through her veins, and a sweet mist before her eyes. But she did see Lesura turn with a sober, puzzled face and start up the step that led to the house.

"Where are you going, Lesura?" she asked, going a little toward her.

Lesura paused and regarded her mistress gravely.

"I am going to get the hook," she replied, and went sombrely out of sight within the dark, cool hallway.

"You bet you are," murmured Lee, almost inaudibly; but Vera caught a faint hint of his words and turned accusingly on him. Lee took a single step away and smiled sheepishly; jokes with Lesura were countenanced by Mrs. Wilton, jokes at her were frowned upon; and Lee felt the "hook" episode came dangerously near outlawry. But before Vera could form her question or Lee begin his elaborate excuse, a clear, ringing voice cried "Home again!" and Bruce Wilton stood framed in the arched doorway of the arbor.

Vera flew to him swiftly, her arms about his neck. The boy disappeared somewhere in the shrubbery. For a moment Bruce held his wife close to him. Neither spoke for a long space of silent heart-beats. All about them, in the air, from the cool, moist earth, in the vaguely stirring leaves, came the subtle change that told of the day's end; that night was coming on. The ebb of Nature's force was beginning. She was putting the last tender touches to her day's work, saying, "Rest, sleep; prepare for the mor-

row." The sun shone now with a milder radiance. The grass, the leaves, the swaying vines took on a deeper green; the air grew heavy with the mixed and spicy odors of flowers, shrubs, and blossoms; far above them circled a flock of pigeons cooing softly to each other as they winged their way homeward. Voices of children at play came up from the street of the little village at the foot of the hill. A mother called her child, and the syllabled sounds were borne to them clearly in the hushed silence.

Vera looked up into her husband's face and laid her hand caressingly on his cheek.

"Tired, Bruce?"

"I was," he smiled down at her.

"Glad to see me?"

He gripped her tighter for an answer.

"It's ages since you went away this morning, Bruce."

"Meant to catch the two-o'clock, but missed it. A big deal on; tell you about it later."

He tossed his panama on the settee and came a little into the arbor. "Hello," he said; "where did Lee disappear?"

The boy came from behind the lattice work, hesitatingly.

"I am hiding in the forest," he said, holding a leafy branch grotesquely over his face.

Bruce laughed and held out his hand. He liked the boy and the way he had seized the opportunity offered him.

"Hello," he said genially, "glad to see you."

"Right back at you, Boss, only stronger," answered Lee as he grasped the outstretched palm.

"Here's the hook."

It was Lesura close behind them. She had come down the steps from the house and held out for general acceptance a long handled button hook. Bruce moved over to her and examined the article with care. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Lee dodge around the tea table, his hand stifling his laughter and he suspected a joke.

"Is that for me, Lesura?" he inquired gravely.

The girl looked up at him seriously and shook her head. Matters had gone quite beyond her mental powers, so far as explanation was concerned.

"I don't know," she said slowly. "Mr. Martin said I ought to get the hook."

A long pause, while she turned it over carefully in her hand, making sure that in this strange environment it had not changed itself to something quite different. It was there, however, gleaming silvery confidence to her, so she drew a deep breath and held it up. "And I got it."

Bruce turned with a smile, as he recollected his offered prize for a laugh to be won from Lesura. He went over to the tea table and dropped into his accustomed seat.

Lesura gazed after him blankly.

"Isn't it the right kind of a hook?" she asked plaintively.

"I don't know, Lesura," returned Bruce. "You see I never was much of a hook judge; ask Lee."

"I will see," said the thus appointed referee bowing gravely to the two people at the tea table. "I was brought up on hooks; yes, yes,

indeed, many a time have I had them thrown into me—tut, tut, I am wandering from my story.”

He took the button hook from Lesura and carefully tried to encircle her neck with it. Nearly exploding with suppressed laughter, Vera and Bruce watched him. Then he tried it upon her plump forearm, shook his head mysteriously, handed it back to Lesura with a low bow and a gravely regretful air.

“No, Miss Watkins, the hook isn’t large enough. Sorry, for I had promised myself the pleasure of teaching you a new and wonderful exercise with it.”

Lesura took the button hook doubtfully. Here was an unexpected complication. She looked at it a moment and then with a view of setting Mr. Martin right, said slowly, “You use that to button boots with.”

“Yes, yes, I know,” returned her monitor politely; “but when you get the hook, it will be in the neck.”

She looked at him in unwinking gravity. This was New York and they were all strange people, with peculiar ways. She seized upon the one idea that remained to her.

“I’ll go and get the right hook,” she said, and left them.

Bruce roared with laughter, and Vera joined his merriment in a silvery upper tone. The laugh had been turned neatly upon the joker and he shook his head and grinned a little ruefully. He was not accustomed to hilarity at his expense.

“Lee, oh, Lee,” groaned Bruce wiping his

eyes; "your wit doesn't seem to make an impression on our friend Lesura."

"She's a tough proposition, Mr. Wilton." He shook his head and then determination flashed in his eyes. "But I'll make her laugh or die trying."

Vera turned to Bruce as the boy disappeared down the path.

"Bruce, dear, aren't you afraid we'll spoil those two?"

"Not a bit, Vera. Heavens, but it's good to laugh; there's tragedy enough in the city."

She laid her cool, soft hand on his a moment.

"A hard day in Wall Street?"

He nodded.

"Worried, Bruce?"

"No, only anxious. I'm in a deal that if anyone knew the real facts, well, they could smash me like that."

His hand closed sharply, to show the utter ruthlessness of the financial world, and she caught her breath sharply.

"Bruce, why do you do it?"

"Money," he returned laconically.

"Yes, but we have enough, haven't we?"

He shook his head slowly. "Nobody has enough, little woman, and, besides, it's the joy of working, accomplishing, taking long chances, matching your brains against other brains and winning out."

"And this deal?" she asked.

"It's a wonder. When I land it, that old street will just sit up, rub it's eyes and stare."

"Going to tell me about it?"

He stared at her across the table so frankly, that she grew self-conscious and drew a little away.

"That's the first time, Vera," he said slowly, "that I ever knew you to be curious about a business affair."

"I'm interested in anything that concerns you, Bruce. Don't you want to tell me?"

He nodded.

"It's a deal I have to be careful about," he said slowly; "because, well, there's been some one working against me in Wall Street for months past."

"Who, Bruce?"

"Ah, there it is; I don't know. But some one has been outguessing me. That's why I'm cautious this time."

"Cautious with me? Oh, Bruce!"

Her tone of half reproach brought him to her side instantly.

"No," he said, "of course not you, dear. Come, I'll tell you tonight and you'll be the only person in the world who does know; even Evarts, my confidential man on the Exchange floor, won't know as much as I'll tell you." He paused a moment, then a tender light came into his eyes. It softened the hard lines that were beginning to show on his smooth, almost boyish, face.

"Do you know what day tomorrow is, Vera?" he asked softly.

"Yes," she nodded up to him brightly; "July eleventh."

"And our wedding anniversary. Hush, no, don't speak. Close your eyes tight now." His

right hand slid into an inner pocket and a dull colored leather case was in her hands. "Now open them," he cried.

She rose from the settee and moved a little away from him, postponing the moment of knowledge of the case's contents. Then she threw its cover back and cried out in her joy.

"Oh, Bruce!"

"To my wife, Vera, on our second anniversary."

"A rosary," she breathed softly, looking down at the case in her hand, then at him with misty eyes. "A rosary of pearls."

"I had them selected one by one, and the cross," he held it in his broad palm; "was made from the first ore taken from my new Western mine."

"How dear of you," was all she could say. Then a thought came to her and she stood away from him smiling. "And my present to you, Bruce——"

"Yes," expectantly.

"Well, I can't give it to you now!"

"No?"

She shook her head and nodded at him brightly. "No, because it isn't finished; that is," she caught herself hurriedly. "It is finished, but it isn't in yet."

He was rather mystified. "In where, Vera?"

She leaned forward, smiling at his puzzled face. "In the house."

Then with a little cry, she sprang in front of him as he made for the steps. "No, Bruce, no!"

"But I don't understand."

She threw back her head and laughed. "I don't mean you shall; only you mustn't enter your study tomorrow until ten o'clock."

Extended hand was his reply and a formal clasp of her own. "I promise, Vera." Then he drew her hand through his arm and they paced slowly up and down the arbor's length.

"Anything new, Vera?"

"Yes, Kenward is here."

"Fine; I hope we can keep him." He paused listening for a moment to a meadow lark's full throated song. "And you know, Vera, Kenward acted like a big man when Uncle Archer left me all that money."

"Didn't he, Bruce?"

He looked at her quickly and a dull wave of color stained his cheeks. "Somehow, Vera, I always thought Ken was in love with you."

Laughter rang from her lips at this and she pinched his hand sharply. "Nonsense, now don't be jealous; that's the one thing that makes me worry sometimes——"

He caught her in his arms almost savagely. "I'm a brute to even suggest such a thing."

"No."

"Yes I am, but—oh, hang it, let's forget it. Anybody called?"

Vera gave a little cry. "Now that reminds me; there's a very pretty girl waiting for Father Kelly. Did you send him a note, Bruce?"

He nodded and laughed. "Why, of course; remember my telling you of a priest who——" He broke off abruptly and stole softly toward the broad opening in the trellis that fronted

toward the hill driveway. Then he called her to him with a gesture and pointed to a black coated figure that was moving slowly up the hill in their direction.

"Father Kelly," he said smiling and drawing her up the steps towards the house. "I'm going to give him the surprise of his life!"

CHAPTER VIII

AFTER MANY YEARS

FATHER KELLY stood in the arbor and gazed back at the winding white ribbon of road up which he had come. He removed his derby hat, he never could accustom himself to the clerical fashion in head covering, and mopped his fine broad forehead with a white silk handkerchief.

"A fine climb to the top of the hill," he mused, "and a fine place when you get here. Only there's nobody about." He gazed about him thoughtfully. "Let me see that note again." He read it through slowly.

"Dear Father Kelly:

"If you will call on Mr. Wilton Tuesday, the eleventh, you will meet an old friend and hear good news."

Then he paused and gazed about him tranquilly. "I wonder what I'd better do?"

"If I were in your place, Father Kelly——"

The priest turned at the words and met Bruce half way down the stairs that led to the house. They eyed each other a moment in silence. Bruce stood on the step, both hands in his pockets, smiling down at the clergyman.

Father Kelly gazed at the good humored young man who had spoken and then shook his head quietly. No, he did not know the gentleman. Doubtless there was a joke concealed somewhere, but at present it was hidden from his humorous

sense. So he bowed in his charming old world manner and asked, "What would you do?"

"I'd rest myself after my long walk."

"That's good advice," said the Father; "and I make it a rule in life to always follow good advice."

He seated himself carefully in a comfortable armchair, and resting his hat upon his knees, gave himself to a closer study of his adviser.

Bruce came down the few remaining steps and moved over carelessly to the opposite side of the tea table. "It's a warm day," he hazarded mildly.

"My dear sir, it's more than that; it's scalding."

"But there's a cool breeze up here."

"I feel the gentle zephyrs on my cheek." He eyed Bruce narrowly and shook his head, no he did not know this gentleman, and yet somehow, somewhere a chord of memory was sounding so faintly that he could not catch the exact harmony. Bruce leaning against the settee was watching him with an affectionate smile.

"Well," said Father Kelly, plaintively, "will you please tell me what I do now?"

"What you do now?" Bruce was puzzled.

"Of course, you're laying down rules for my behavior. 'Sit down,' says you, and here I am planted like a marble statue in your fine arbor. 'A cool breeze,' you said, and I have my bald pate turned toward it. So I ask you now what next?"

Bruce laughed, then suddenly took a step toward him and spread his arms wide. "Look at me."

"Faith, you're so in the middle of the landscape I can't miss you with my eyes. I'm looking."

"Tell me my name!"

Father Kelly stole a surreptitious look at the note and answered promptly, "Wilton!" Then he cocked his head a little to one side and asked naively, "Am I prompt in my answers?"

But the next question came quickly. "Where have you seen me before?"

"Well, I—I——" he could only stammer.

"Quick, now," Bruce shot at him. "Quick."

"Easy, my son," for the good Father was a little confused; all the strings of memory were jangling and he could not catch the sounds clearly.

"Easy, don't rush an old man off his feet." He raised his head with sudden inspiration. "Was it in church?"

Bruce's face hardened. It always did when religion, spiritual matters were mentioned. "No, I haven't been inside a church for twenty years."

Sorrow showed in Father Kelly's eyes, sorrow and something akin to pity. He shook his head gravely. "I'm sorry to hear that, very sorry."

The cloud on Bruce's countenance gave way to a broad smile. "Yes, you always were."

The simple words struck an answering chord in the good Father. He leaned forward, his eyes searching Bruce's face. "I always was—I always——" He shook his head impatiently and his gaze came back to the smiling face. "Man, dear, your voice has a familiar ring, and your smile is like that of someone—someone—"

who——” His voice died away to a murmur, as his mind went back over the fruitful years of his past.

But Bruce had pity on his mental effort, and helped him by completing his unspoken thought. “Of someone who walked and talked with you many years ago, Father Kelly, when you used to shake your fist at him and say——” He paused and then touched the string of memory with a quotation, a line of Virgil that had clung to him. “*Arma virumque cano——*”

And Father Kelly completed it half mechanically: “*Trojae qui primus ab oris.*”

He looked at Bruce and the years rolled away. Again he sat in his study in that quaint old New England town, and an overgrown youngster bent and twisted and wriggled in his chair, as he construed the immortal lines. Almost with a shout of joy the good Father leaped from his chair and faced his tormentor, his face shining with the joy of recognition.

“Murder alive,” he gasped; “it’s Bruce, my dear boy Bruce whom I yanked through his Latin by the hair of his head; Bruce.” His manner changed and his brows gathered in a portentous frown. He drew himself up to his full height and commanded. “Bruce Wilton, come here!”

The transition was so sudden that Bruce quailed. He knew that old familiar attitude, that ring in the musical voice. With an effective imitation of his old schoolboy way he shuffled over to his friend. They gazed at each other a moment or so, and then Father Kelly threw both his arms about his shoulders and held him close.

"Father Kelly," said Bruce wondering if he had carried the joke too far.

The Father released him slowly and looked at him once more. Then slowly he raised his right hand, the fingers doubled. "For two pins, I'd lather the head off you."

"No, you don't," cried Bruce, flying for safety behind the settee. "I've felt the weight of that right hand of yours before in our bouts with the gloves."

The priest's hand outspread was raised deprecatingly. "Is it a fighter you're making of me?"

"Well, your religion was never of the molly-coddle kind, Father Kelly; that's what I always liked about it."

His old friend came across the intervening space and laid his hand on his shoulder gently. "But you never liked it well enough to make it your own."

Their eyes met for a long look of affection before Bruce answered. "I don't believe in any religion, Father!"

A strange look came over the priest's face. It was as though material things had vanished for the moment, and he saw truly with the inward spiritual eye of faith. For an instant his lips moved, though they uttered no sound. His hand sought that of the man who stood close beside him and clasped it close. "I know that, Bruce, and it was always a great grief to me. But I live in hope, lad. His ways are wonderful and He may yet show you that His mighty hand rules the universe."

He moved a little away from his friend and gazed at him smiling.

"There, there, Bruce, dear lad, sure my love for you makes me forget I'm not in my pulpit preaching." He drew his chair toward the table and dropped into it as he went on: "Tell me about yourself. I was sent to a Southern parish when you entered college, that's how I lost track of you. You've done well?"

Bruce faced him smiling across the tea table. He waved his hand comprehensively about him, taking in the luxurious surroundings. "So well, Father Kelly, that sometimes I'm afraid."

His friend eyed him sharply. "Afraid of what, Bruce?"

Bruce leaned back on the settee and frowned. "Well, I don't know," he admitted, "but luck may change, you know."

"Sometime," said Father Kelly calmly, "when you have two days to spare, I'll prove to you that there's no such thing as luck."

"I'm no match for you in argument," laughed Bruce. Then his face grew grave. "I've added to the fortune my uncle left me until now I'm worth a cool million."

"I hear you," said Father Kelly, "but it's hard to follow you. I can think very well in tens and hundreds, but a million, well, it nigh takes my breath away."

Bruce smiled. "I've this estate, a business I enjoy, prospects of doing still better, and——" he stole a look at his friend and leaned far over the table; "and a wife."

"Aha," cried Father Kelly, raising his hand and waving it at him in perfect comprehension. "I've been waiting for the rustle of a petticoat."

"The dearest girl in the world, Father Kelly!"

The priest nodded in perfect accord with his enthusiasm. "I'll bet you."

"Strange, too," Bruce went on; "she's religious; believes in everything I reject."

Father Kelly laid his hand gently upon Bruce's arm. "Then there is hope for the head of the house, my boy."

Bruce smiled, the good father's insistence amused him when he thought of the depths of unbelief in his own mind. "And our meeting," he went on, "was the strangest thing. Out in the country, a Western town, I happened to be passing by a little ramshackly church. Some one was playing the Rosary."

Faintly through the golden sunset, mingling with the odors of buds and blossoms, almost like a higher accompaniment to the gentle breeze from the river below the hill, came the sound of a piano in the house. Vera was playing that magnificent anthem of love for Kathleen in the music room. The two men raised their heads instinctively and listened for a moment; then Bruce repeated slowly the human words that vitalized the wonderful harmony.

"The hours I spent with thee, dear heart,

Are as a string of pearls to me,

I count them over every one apart,

My rosary, my rosary.

Each hour a pearl, each pearl a prayer,

To still a heart by absence wrung;

I tell each bead unto the end—

And there a cross is hung."

The sound of the piano died away in a note that was almost a sob of pain.

Father Kelly laid his hand gently upon that of Bruce. There was something of the mystic in his face, as though his eyes saw beyond the present, looked into the future. He repeated slowly, dwelling on each word. "And there a cross is hung."

Bruce raised his head, a little awed by his friend's tone. Something there seemed to be of significance in the hand on his own, the look within the eyes directed on him. An intangible sensation, vague, elusive, like a breath, a whisper seemed to touch them both. Then a cool, tender voice broke through the fancies each mind was weaving.

"Bruce, dear," said Vera, from the steps, "what keeps you?"

He rose laughing and came to meet her. "Here she is, Father Kelly! It was her voice that drew me that day."

The priest turned and looked at Vera, then he smiled and took her extended hand. "Sure, and that's no wonder."

"Then you don't blame Bruce, Father Kelly?"

He gently touched her hand with his disengaged one. "Faith, ma'am, if he hadn't been drawn, well, he'd have been more than human."

"Blarney!" and Vera shook her finger at him.

"Not a bit of it. Cold nineteen hundred and ten truth."

She moved to the tea table. "Tea after that!"

"Is that a hint, ma'am, that my compliment to you is hot air?"

Bruce laughed as he waved his friend to a seat. "Not a bit of it."

"Never had such an idea." Vera looked at him archly over the tea she was pouring. Like it strong, Father Kelly?"

"Suit yourself!" He leaned back and smiled at the charming picture she made. "Sure, I'll engage to drink it as you pour it out, Mrs. Wilton."

"No, no," objected Vera sharply.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am." Father Kelly was puzzled at his hostess' tone.

She bent toward him graciously and laid the tips of her fingers on his shoulder. "Not Mrs. Wilton—Vera to my dear friends," and she handed him his cup.

His glance at her was full of affection. Father Kelly knew people almost at the instant of their meeting. "Does that mean I'm elected to that honorable number?"

"Unanimously!" and she deftly dropped a lump of sugar in his cup.

"My thanks," he said. "Sure, and it's knight-hood you've conferred on me."

Vera laughed. "Oh, you Irishmen! Bruce has a drop of the blood in him."

"Of course; isn't he *my* friend?"

They laughed a little at this reply and there was silence for a moment.

Bruce put back his chair with an exclamation. "Father Kelly!"

His friend just on the point of taking his first sip of the steaming cup, paused and surveyed him. "Man, dear, are you wishful to scald me? What's happened, anyhow?"

Bruce leaned back in his chair and smiled a

little wickedly. "Why, quite by accident I put some whisky in your tea!"

"Bruce!" Vera's tone was reproachful.

"I'm very sorry, Father!"

"Well, said Father Kelly; "was it good whisky?"

The naive question brought a roar of laughter from Bruce. "Real Irish, fifteen years old."

"Well," said Father Kelly sniffing its aroma cautiously. "Well, let it stay. If it's that old, it would be a crime to disturb it." But when their merriment at this had subsided, he gravely handed his cup back to Vera.

She took it wonderingly. "You don't approve?"

"Ah, now that depends; whisky is a fine servant, but 'tis bad to be ruled by it, and 'tis such an uncertain creature you never know when it may create a revolution and misgovern you. Besides if I did take it, someone who hadn't the strength to use it in moderation might see me—and—well, sure I'm better off without it."

Bruce laughed. It almost seemed to him he was back in that tiny orchard of the Father's parsonage years ago. "You haven't changed a bit, Father Kelly."

But his friend shook his head slowly. "Yes, lad, I'm balder and my hair is whiter."

"But how comes it you're out here, Father? Why, a man like you should be at the head of one of the finest churches in New York City."

"But, Bruce, I chose this place." And he raised his hand to check their exclamations. "Yes, I knew that there were men, women and little

children here who were starving for the bread of God's word."

The sincerity of the man was absolute. He spoke without any appreciable sense of what it might mean to relinquish ambition, honors, applause, everything most men seek, and find his joy and peace in simple duty, performed with a whole heart and in the spirit of love.

Vera laid her hand on his arm. There was a mist before her eyes. "And you hold services in a tent, Father Kelly?"

"'Tis all the same," he said simply; "whether the Master calls in doors or out. Didn't the good fathers who came to America when all was a wilderness do without churches? And, sure, I'm no better than they."

"Charming in summer," interjected Bruce, "but how about winter?"

Father Kelly put down his cup and smiled, then he shook his head and grimaced. "I'll not say it's thoroughly comfortable in January." He leaned over the table towards them. "One of my congregation, a rebel and an anarchist, but a good fellow, came to me one morning at early Mass, when the snow blew in and drifted about my feet and, says he, 'Father Kelly, preach to us about the place where the wicked will go,' he says, 'and faith, you'll melt the snow about you.'" He leaned back enjoying their hearty laughter for a moment, then took up his cup again with a wise shake of his gray head.

"Wouldn't you like a church?"

Father Kelly paused with his cup half raised and considered Bruce's question. "Well, I'm not avaricious, my boy, but I could use one."

Suddenly Vera put up her hand and checked them. "There's a new chapel building near the foot of this hill, isn't there?"

Bruce nodded. "And when it is finished, the keys will be turned over to Father Kelly."

"To me!" The good priest was astonished. He put his cup down and stared at Bruce, who, leaning back in his chair, was lighting a cigarette with elaborate unconcern. "To me!" He glanced at Vera, who lifted her hands protesting her ignorance, then at his friend, who regarded him blandly. "Ah, go on, and don't be cracking your jokes at an old man."

"But it's the truth, Father!"

"You mean it?"

"I certainly do; built by special permission of the Archbishop of New York. The money is laid aside, a special fund has been created. It will be completed in a year from today, and its name is the Chapel of the Rosary."

Vera looked at Bruce too astonished for words. He made a smiling gesture of silence to her and they both turned to the priest. His head was sunk on his breast and he seemed to be considering the good news with all his mental powers. Then he felt their eyes on him, and, raising his head, extended his muscular arm to his hostess. "Well, Vera, there's only one way out of this; will you have the kindness to pinch me?"

"Father Kelly," cried Vera, rising in her alarm.

"I must be walking in my sleep. Please pinch me!"

Bruce nodded and Vera obeyed, something too

earnestly to judge from the wry face the good Father made.

"Yes, I'm awake," he said, "but where did it come from, who——"

"I gave it to you, old friend," and in Bruce's voice there sounded the deep affection of a strong, vital man.

Father Kelly looked at his friend and his eyes were dim with gratitude. "I'm trying to speak, Bruce, but the words won't come."

Bruce laid his hand on Vera's arm. "And on the day you open the chapel doors, there will be a new organ, a gift from Vera."

She turned to him with a sudden comprehension. "That's the organ you made me select, Bruce, and refused to tell me what it was for. Father Kelly, the day your chapel opens I will play the organ for your service."

"And though I don't believe in religion at all, Father," said Bruce; "I'll come to church that day."

Father Kelly looked from one friend to the other. "Save me, but you simply overwhelm me with your goodness. It's a tidal wave of love that is sweeping over me." His voice broke a little on the last words and he put his hand over his eyes.

Vera made a gesture to Bruce and he nodded as he bent over the table toward his friend. "Can't you swim, Father?"

"Get out of that, you blatherer!" cried his friend, pursuing him to the confines of the arbor, while Vera laughingly applauded.

Bruce stood at bay in an angle of the trellis

work and Father Kelly caught his hand in a cordial grasp. He turned to Vera and she came nearer smiling; so they stood a moment looking out from their commanding position upon the river and hills, the quiet town touched now with twilight's brush of soft color.

"Bruce, my dear boy, and my dear Vera, it is from a full heart I say thank you, thank——" He broke off impatiently and looked wonderingly at them. "Now don't those words sound foolish."

They laughed a little at this and Vera put her hand in the priest's. Somehow she felt uplifted with this stalwart clergyman, her friend. The doubts and fears she had mentioned to Kenward no longer had a place in her mind.

Bruce had strolled quite to the other end of the arbor and now called his friend. "Let's see how much botany you've forgotten, Father; here's a plant I want you to name."

Vera had turned to follow the priest when she saw Lesura descending the stairs. There was something about the girl's manner, a hesitation, that caused her mistress to pause. "What is it, Lesura?" she asked quietly.

"Your sister has come, Mrs. Wilton!"

Vera gave a little gasp of surprise and her eyes dilated. "Alice here!" And she put her foot upon the lower step.

"But, Mrs. Wilton, your sister said she didn't want to be disturbed. She came to the side door. I took her up to the room next to yours because she looked just beat out, and I guess she was, for she dropped down on the bed. She said for



"It is from a full heart I say thank you"

you not to tell anyone that she was here, except Mr. Wilton."

"Call it's name now, Father," laughed Bruce from quite the other end of the arbor. "I'll give you three guesses."

"But Bruce, let me think a moment."

His friend laughed and clapped him gaily on the shoulder. He turned toward Vera, "and this hard hearted monster used to keep me after hours because I flunked on botany——" His quick eye caught the troubled look on her face and he came to her, taking both her hands.

She answered the unspoken question in his eyes, as Lesura at her nod went into the house. "Alice is here, Bruce; she doesn't want anyone to know it."

"Alice always was peculiar, you know," he smiled. "Come, now, don't worry!"

"I know, Bruce, but I feel as though something were hanging over us."

Father Kelly came towards them in time to catch her last words. He took Vera's hand gently in his. "Well, ma'am," he said, "if it drops, sure I'm here to catch it."

Vera clung to his broad palm for a moment, then the subtle sense of oppression was gone. "Thank you!" she murmured gratefully.

"What's the name of our friend in the urn, Father?" persisted Bruce.

"Shamrock, you omadhaun," triumphantly from his friend.

"Right; didn't think you'd guess it!"

"More shame to you, then; do you think the old sod could disguise itself from a man who was born in Roscommon county?"

"Hurroo!" cried Vera.

Father Kelly patted her gently on the shoulder. "Ma'am," he smiled, "if you're not Irish, sure you ought to be."

"Uncle Brian." It was Kathleen's voice from the loggia. She stood there looking down at them a little timidly, one foot toying tentatively with the upper step.

"And is that yourself, Kathleen?" Father Kelly smiled up at her.

Kathleen ran down the steps. "Yes, I have a letter for you." She handed it to him with a grave air of matronly protection.

Vera gave a little cry of penitence. "Oh, dear, can you forgive me? I was so happy at meeting Father Kelly that really I forgot all about you."

"Faith, I'm glad you came, Katy," said the priest while Vera presented his niece to Bruce. He held up the note Kathleen had handed him and asked with a look for permission to open it. As Vera nodded over Kathleen's courtesying head, he broke the seal and added as he skimmed its contents, "Sure, Katy's not been feeling quite herself of late."

"That's too bad," and Vera brushed back a stray lock from the girls broad white brow and smiled at her.

"No message in that letter," put in Bruce, who had moved over close to his friend's shoulder, "that will prevent you and your niece dining with us?"

Father Kelly raised his head from the note and smiled. "This? No; 'tis only a notification

that in ten months the lot on which my tent stands must be vacated."

Bruce put his arm about his friend's shoulder. "We'll have the Chapel of the Rosary ready by that time."

The priest nodded and gripped his hand. "Bruce, dear lad, you've made me very happy on this beautiful evening."

Their eyes wandered out from the arbor over the charming view that was spread before them. All the bright colors of the sun's glorious setting were gone. The sky was a canopy of pale blue, as though some invisible, mighty hand were spreading it over the world. Here and there a star glowed like a jeweled fastening in the robe of approaching night. A new moon was rising beyond the grove of saplings behind the trellis, its silver crescent seemed to cut the soft upper air like a scimitar worn at the side of some mighty monarch of the sky. Fireflies sparkled here and there, in the grass, upon the shrubs, trees, vines; below in the village lights twinkled and the sound of a stringed quartette could be plainly heard.

"Isn't it heavenly?" murmured Vera softly. Her hand went out in the shadow and nestled in her husband's.

The priest's eyes looked up into the fathomless depth of the blue vault and he answered, after a pause, "Well, if Heaven is more beautiful than this, faith, I don't think I could stand it."

And now, the windows of the house glowed, a shaft of amber light cut the growing darkness

of the loggia and its steps from a jeweled lamp placed high over the main doorway.

"And what do you call your place?" asked the priest.

"Eden," said Bruce, smiling.

"After the Garden of Eden," explained Vera. "Bruce named it."

Father Kelly shook his finger admonishingly at his hostess. "Aha, but don't forget, there was a serpent in that garden long ago, with a forked tongue that did more mischief than all the world has been able to repair since!"

They laughed at this for a moment, then Bruce replied, "No serpent here, Father Kelly!"

"Then it's not Eden, dear boy!"

"Ah!" cried Vera. "If there is a serpent here find it! Do as St. Patrick did in your country and drive it out!" She put her arm about Kathleen and smiled down at her.

The priest made her a low bow and turned his right cuff back grimly. "Oh, I'll do the driving fast enough, but I must find the serpent first." He searched the dim corners of the arbor with his keen gray eyes.

"Call him," suggested Bruce. "Any well conducted serpent ought to answer."

Father Kelly turned on him. "Will you have done with your jokes, Bruce? 'Tis a serious business, this serpent hunting."

Laughingly, Vera drew Kathleen toward the steps. "Come in to dinner," she called to them. "Bruce, you must hurry and dress!"

"True for you, Vera," said the Father. "Sure, this serpent may be in the house!"

Bruce shouted with laughter at this and they drew nearer the broad staircase.

"Well, Bruce, old man!" It was Kenward Wright coming to meet them in most correct dinner dress, his hand stretched out to his old friend, who greeted him warmly.

Vera turned with her charming smile and presented him to Kathleen; then she turned to the priest. "Father Kelly, this is Mr. Kenward Wright, one of our oldest and dearest friends."

"Father Kelly!" Kenward took the extended hand with a frank, good humored smile, then he ran up the steps and laughed a question at his hostess. "Vera, I'm starving, can we——" Their voices broke into cheerful raillery as they mounted the stairs.

But Father Kelly did not follow directly. He stood silent, a puzzled look on his anxious face. His eyes looked straight up into the deep vault of blue as though he sought an answer there to some question in his mind.

"I—wonder," he murmured, and then went slowly up the stairs.

CHAPTER IX

THE NOTE OF DISCORD

THAT," laughed Vera from the head of the table, "is a very good story, Father Kelly."

He sat upon her right in the broad, low ceiled dining room. The round table, charmingly decorated had been moved a little nearer the open fire, for Vera loved to hear the crackle and snap of oak wood at this hour, and besides the evenings were a little cool.

Dinner with the Wiltons was something more than feeding. The room was rich in plain woods in their natural colors; the light fell in a subdued glow from the ornate bell-shaped glass over the table's center; those who helped the guests came and went like shadows. You talked if you cared to do so; you kept silence if that suited you better, and in any event you were sure to leave the house with a tranquillity rarely attained in these modern days of rush and hurry. Many celebrities had sat at the Wiltons' board. Over in the angle near the window, was scratched on the dark oak wainscoting, the name of the foremost English speaking actress and this was balanced on the opposite side by a French man of letters, whose name is a synonym for the best in literature.

"A very good story," Vera repeated and glanced about the table for confirmation of her judgment.

They all nodded lazily. That portion of the dinner had been reached where Contentment waits, and in the soft glow of the amber light and the flickering candles this mythical presence had seized upon them all.

"Kathleen looks a little pale, Father; or is it the lights and the novelty?"

Father Kelly stole a look at his niece and nodded. "She's not been quite well of late. No," he went on in answer to her unspoken question, "I don't think it's anything serious; sure, a young girl like that has all sorts of mental fancies."

At the other end of the table, Bruce looked up and laughed. "You want to hear this, Vera, and Father Kelly, your niece is telling us a mind reading story."

"Well," remonstrated Kathleen slyly, "I don't know that I'd call it mind reading, but he found the needle and he was blindfolded."

"That explodes one of the dear old fictions of our youth, good people." Kenward looked at the faces about the table, smiling a little at his thought. "Traditional needle in a hay mow, or was it hay stack? Anyway, it was a symbol of the impossible, gone now with the advent of Miss O'Connor's blindfolded prodigy."

Kathleen turned to him. "Mine? Why, he didn't belong to me."

The room rang with their laughter at this denial. Vera put up her hand. "You mustn't allow Ken to tease you, dear."

"Hadn't the remotest idea of doing so, Vera."

"He's a dreadful tease," persisted Vera; "sometimes when you don't realize what he's about."

Kenward laughed and leaned back in his chair. The deft servant slipped his empty plate away and substituted with the ease of legerdermain the coffee and cigarettes. Thoughtfully he took one of the slender white cylinders in his fingers, asked permission of Kathleen, his neighbor, and Father Kelly and bent over the flaming taper the silent form at his side held out.

"Really, I'm not teasing, Vera, but mind reading always excites me to unrighteous mirth."

"You don't believe in anything of that sort, then?" Bruce rested his elbow on the table and studied the ash of his cigarette.

"I'm not experienced, never had a thought in my brain worth reading."

Bruce turned to the priest. "How about it, Father Kelly?"

"Ah, my dear fellow, that's not a subject to be settled in a word." He nodded his head gravely.

Vera looked up from a whispered order she was giving a servant, who went out quietly through the heavy hangings at the further end of the room. "Wait, I'm awfully interested," she said. "Mind reading—telepathy they call it now—don't they?"

"Any name is good enough for such an idiotic theory," interjected Kenward.

"Let Father Kelly talk to us about it," Bruce interrupted him.

The priest looked at the intent faces about him and smiled. "Bruce, dear, no man can talk much about such an abstruse subject. We're all just like children who are groping their way toward the

light. No one knows, but I think we all feel that sometimes we graze the border land of a world unseen."

"I don't," laughed Kenward. "One world at a time is good enough for me."

Father Kelly looked at him intently for a long moment before he replied. "But you're young yet, Mr. Wright, there are many years before you."

And so the conversation went on, punctuated with their laughter, while the velvet shod servant found Lee and delivered his message from Mrs. Wilton.

The boy was curled up in a chair in the kitchen, a book in his hands. He put it down and stared. "Get Mr. Charles Harrow," he repeated. "Why sure," and after some mysterious preparations in his own particular corner, he disappeared through the screen door that led to the grounds.

Lesura saw him go and wondered. Anything this strange mortal did was of interest to her. She had tried to help with the dinner and was quietly banished by the expert butler after the first course. She noted the direction taken by Lee and tiptoed up the stairs unobserved by the others. From the study windows she could command a wide stretch of the grounds and could see the result of the boy's errand, but as she came through the curtains of the room, she paused, for her mistress' sister was standing there, her hand on the knob of the door that led to the stairs above.

Lesura paused. "Why, Miss Alice." She had

not intended to speak, but something in the girl's face made her feel that she needed sympathy.

Alice half opened the door, then stopped and smiled. In figure, manner, expression she was Vera's living counterpart, but the face was pale and the eyes looked weary, as though they had been studying a problem that baffled them. "You're the girl who met me when I came this afternoon?"

Lesura nodded. "Yes'm, Lesura's my name. Lesura Watkins from Bellows Falls, Vermont. It's a grand place." She added this half defiantly to forestall the smile that usually greeted her mention of her native town.

"I've no doubt it is!"

"Mrs. Vera told me to stand ready if you wanted anything. You've woke up, haven't you?"

"Yes. They're at dinner, aren't they?"

Lesura assented slowly. "Yes'm; that priest man is an awful nice fellow. I spilled some soup on him and he didn't get mad a bit. But Mr. Butler did; wouldn't let me wait any more. Aren't you hungry, Miss Alice?"

A loud burst of laughter came from the dining room; they had dropped occult subjects and Father Kelly was telling them another story.

Alice shivered, the gaiety seemed to jar on her. She shook her head. "No, I'm going to my room. When my sister isn't busy ask her to please come to me." The door closed on her and Lesura heard her light step ascending the stairs. She looked all about her for some explanation of this strange conduct. "She's a funny

woman," she reflected, then paused undecided whether to follow Alice or seek her sister.

While she considered this problem, Charley Harrow entered the room from the garden. He was in dinner dress, but the frown on his face hardly matched his attire. Behind him marched Lee, his face set in lines of determination, and words of command on his lips. "Straight ahead for yours, Mr. Harrow!"

Charley turned and leaned against the flat topped table desk that occupied the center of the room. "You've got a nerve, Martin."

Lee bowed calmly. "I only know my orders. 'Get Mr. Harrow,' that was the message from Mrs. Vera. No," as his charge made a movement towards the garden window, "don't try to beat it."

"Why?" asked Charley curiously.

"Because it will be my painful duty to stop you with this." On his right hand, which he brought from behind him, was a well worn boxing glove.

"What's that, Martin?"

"An old five-ounce glove that I wore when I licked the Hoboken Terror. Now where will you have it?"

"So you're a fighter, are you?"

"Please don't make me prove it, Mr. Harrow."

Charley looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, then drew his hands from his pockets.

"Yes, I think I will. Time!"

Lesura had listened to them, realizing that the difference in opinion did not concern her, but fighting—that was a different matter. Bruce's

study where they stood was her particular province. Every morning she swept and dusted it, and it was her pride to have it looking attractive. She stepped between the two gladiators and raised her hand. "If you don't stop," she said calmly, "I'll lick you both."

While they paused and stared at this sign of activity on Lesura's part, Bruce Wilton parted the curtains of the arched opening to the hall. "Hello," he exclaimed briskly, "what's all this?"

Lee bowed and repeated his formula. "Mrs. Vera sent me word to 'get Mr. Harrow.'" Then he obeyed Bruce's nod and went toward the hall slowly.

"Why the deuce didn't you come into dinner, Charley?" Bruce spoke with some asperity; he felt his patience going.

The young man sighed deeply. "I'm not hungry."

"What the devil ails you?" His woebegone air irritated Bruce.

Lee fondled the boxing glove on his hand and came to Bruce's elbow. "He needs exercise, boss!"

A thought stole through Lesura's mind. There had been a case in Bellows Falls when—— She gave her thought words, it might help. "Maybe he's coming down with the mumps!"

Bruce smiled: Charley turned on Lesura with an indignant shout, "I'm not!"

Thoughtfully Bruce put his hands in his pockets and went to a heavy mahogany escritoire. He had left the dining room to get a cigar for Kenward.

Lesura went through the arch shaking her head slowly. "It might be the mumps, after all."

She felt a touch on her arm and turned slowly, sudden movement or hasty feeling were impossibilities for her.

Lee held the curtain of the arch back in his hand and smiled at her guilelessly. She had learned to dread that amused look. Her wide open eyes asked a question and he replied to it by volunteering information. "Amos is coming here tonight, Lesura."

Silence a moment while she gave the news her serious consideration.

"Amos who?" she asked.

Lee bent over her, an appealing look on his face. "A-mos-quito—a-mos-qui-to." He stood almost on tiptoe, his hands spread out in a broad gesture. Would she please laugh and save his reputation as a joker—would she? "Tell me that you see this one," he implored, "or the river will get me."

Lesura looked at him and wondered. "Mosquitoes are here every night, Mr. Martin." Then she started to go on, to reason with him, to ask him why he attached so much importance, to—

But Lee reeled back from her and put his handkerchief to his eyes; firmly he took himself by the coat lapel and his voice grew stern. "This way out, young man, don't try to resist an officer of the law. You are under arrest."

* While she gazed after him as he vanished through the hall, Bruce called her: "Lesura, take my cigar case to Mr. Wright!"

But Kenward came from the dining room as she turned to go; in fact, they nearly collided.

"Hello, Lesura," Kenward called cheerily, as he took the extended case. "In another moment I'd have hugged you." He selected a cigar carefully and tossed the case to Bruce with a nod of thanks. Then he looked down at the serious face. "What would you have done then?"

She reflected on this proposition calmly. "I'll have to think it over." Then she backed slowly out through the arch.

Both Kenward and Bruce laughed at Lesura's reply, but young Harrow stood gloomily silent.

"Ah," said Kenward as he lighted his cigar; "there's a strange girl; takes you literally every time." He tossed the match away and leaned on the broad mantel. "Talking with Charley Grouch, eh, Bruce?"

"Hold on now, Ken——" began his victim fiercely, but Bruce cut him short.

"That's a good name for you, by Jove, Charley Grouch."

"Isn't it," admired Kenward lazily; then he blew a cloud of smoke towards the ceiling and asked of it. "What's biting Charley?"

The object of their laughter replied with a sudden burst of feeling. "Oh, you can laugh, but you don't know what it is to have a secret sorrow eating into your life; you who only see the outside, without a thought of what lies in here, in here." He gesticulated wildly, then thrust his hands into his pockets and went out through the broad French window into the garden.

"Well, ejaculated Bruce in amazement; "what do you think of that?"

Kenward answered in a careless drawl, "I think our young friend had best see a doctor."

"Confound him; I'm beginning to worry about the youngster."

Kenward strolled over to him smiling. "That all of your worries, old man?"

Bruce shook his head impatiently; try as he would there had been a vague feeling of oppression hanging over him. "I wish," he said slowly, "that I was a little surer of the stock market tomorrow."

"That's the penalty you pay, Bruce, for wanting more money."

Bruce puffed energetically at his cigar. "Maybe," he answered thoughtfully.

Evidently Kenward was interested. He sat on the broad desk and played with a silver paper knife. "A big deal on, eh, Bruce?"

"Yes, every dollar I have is at stake."

"Ah; risky this stock market game; that's why I keep out of it. Well, good luck to you!"

Bruce broke in abruptly. "Ken, you know me pretty well, who's this enemy of mine——"

"Enemy?" Kenward stared at him. "What the devil are you talking about?"

"A fact, Ken. Queer things have happened to me lately. Three times I've just missed landing a big deal."

The tall, blonde man on the table laughed and swung his foot to and fro. "Well, suppose you have, you can't win every time. Spoil the excitement, wouldn't it?"

"I know that, but it's happened when I was sure, when I had told no one of my plans. Ken it's as though someone had a mental control over me and meant my ruin."

"How can you talk such nonsense?" laughed Kenward.

"But I feel it," persisted Bruce. "Who in the devil's name is it?"

"You haven't an enemy in the whole world."

"I have." Bruce's voice was earnest. "The feeling has been absent for the past few weeks; tonight," he brought his clenched hand down heavily on the desk before him, "tonight it has come back."

Kenward started to reply, but paused as Vera came through the arch from the dining room with Father Kelly, their heads bent over a blueprint of the Chapel of the Rosary.

"Don't disturb Vera with such notions, Bruce, you'll only worry her," and Kenward put his hand on his friend's shoulders and shook him gently.

"You know I can hardly believe it even now, Vera," Father Kelly was saying.

"What, not after this tangible evidence?" She laid the blueprint on the desk and leaned over it smiling at him. "You see," she went on gaily, "that's the organ loft, a little gallery quite by itself, right where I can look down on you while I am playing."

He looked into her eager young face and his lips trembled a little; there was about Father Kelly a twist of character that was thoroughly feminine. Feeling was sudden and swift with

him, and his mental processes often moved quite by intuition. A wonderful smile stole over his ruddy, clean shaven face, and he shook his head at her. "Well, if I can't preach with your eyes on me, sure then I'd better resign."

She laughed and turned away to Bruce, who came across the room to them. "Bruce, dear," she said, "Kathleen's looking through the books in the library. She's quite mad over Irish history and I told her you had several rare editions." Then her quick eye caught the suspicion of trouble in his eyes, and she drew nearer him with ready sympathy. "Troubled about anything, Bruce?"

Manfully, Bruce shook off his morbid thoughts. He laughed and patted her hand. "Nothing in the world, dear!"

Father Kelly had discreetly withdrawn with the blueprint to the corner of the mantel. Kenward lounged over to him and studied the drawing. "A fine chapel, Father Kelly!"

The priest looked up quickly and he studied Kenward for a moment. Something almost like a frown showed on his fine, intellectual face, then he threw the feeling off and answered heartily, "Ah, you may well say that, Mr. Wright, and Mrs. Wilton has just been telling me of all the decorations and how my pulpit is to be finished in pure gold, think of that, sir."

Vera spoke to Bruce softly, her hand on the knob of the door leading to the stairs. "I'm going to see Alice. You haven't told Ken or the others she's here?"

Bruce shook his head and opened the door for her. "Want me to go with you, dear?"

"No; Lesura said Alice asked me to come up." She put her foot on the lower stair, then paused. "Oh, where's Charley?"

Kenward heard her question and came forward laughing. "Roaming about the grounds in the moonlight."

"That youngster's crazy, Vera," put in Bruce testily.

Vera ran up two steps and leaned over the stair rail. "Have Father Kelly talk to Charley," she cried laughingly; "he'll cure him."

"That's a good idea." Bruce closed the door on Vera and pressed a button for a servant.

"Wonder we didn't think of it before," echoed Kenward.

Father Kelly laid down his cherished blueprint and came over to them, a question in his eyes. "And who's Charley, if you please, gentlemen?"

"Vera's cousin," Kenward replied. "I think his trouble is caused by having too much money."

"Now you interest me," smiled the priest. "I'd like to see one human being who suffered from that complaint."

Bruce waved his hand smiling. "You shall, Father," and, as the curtains parted he turned to Lee, who had answered his summons. "Lee, will you——" Then he paused for the boy was not looking at him nor did he hear the beginning of the order. His eyes were fastened upon Father Kelly with a look of absolute adoration.

"Well, well, well," cried the priest joyfully, "if it isn't my old friend Lee Martin."

Lee nodded, just then he couldn't speak, something in his throat kept back the words. "How are you, Father?" he managed finally to stammer.

"Come here to me, lad, and give me a grip of your hand," and he shook it vigorously. "Well, well, and what are you doing here, my boy?"

The boy drew himself up proudly. "I'm Mr. Wilton's valet de chambre, and then some."

"I don't know what that is, my lad, but it sounds very important."

They looked at each other silently for a moment; each was thinking of that other meeting, when the city slept and the gray dawn was near. It flashed through the boy's mind how different things might have been if he had chosen another house that night for his depredation, if—— Then he looked his friend square in the eye. "And I'm on the level, too," he cried. "I'm so level, Father Kelly, you could put billiard balls on me and they wouldn't roll off."

The priest made a quick gesture of perfect understanding, then Kenward struck in coldly. "One would infer from that remark that you were at one time——" His long, taper fingers completed the sentence with the sly movement of the pickpocket.

Lee followed and comprehended the gesture. He nodded calmly. "Sure, Mr. Wright, I was a crook."

Kenward took a step toward Bruce, who only smiled. Something of all this he knew from Lee's own words, the particulars he had never sought.

"Why, do you know how I first met up with Father Kelly?" Lee went on, "I broke into his house; that is, I thought I did, but the door

wasn't locked. Father there caught me dead to rights and he bluffed the fly cop that trailed me—and saved me. That's what you did, saved me from going to jail—gave me a chance to go straight, and it's me for you every time." He took a step nearer his friend and there was in his eyes the light of utter and complete devotion. "Why, Father Kelly, I'd go to——"

The priest raised one finger warningly, his young friend's ardor was carrying him a little too far.

"Well," said Lee, half regretfully at not being allowed to name the exact limits of his regard; "well, I'd go *there* for you," and he pointed to the supposed location of the fiery region energetically.

Father Kelly laid his arm across the boy's shoulders and smiled at him. "Thank you, my lad, but I'd rather see you travel in a different direction."

"Yes," said Bruce. "Suppose you find Mr. Harrow and bring him here."

"What, again?" Lee was surprised into a question regarding orders.

"I want to meet him, lad."

Lee bowed and went to the open window. "You bet you will, Father Kelly, if I have to uppercut him to bring him," and he went out into the garden quickly.

There was a smile of contentment on the priest's face as he watched the boy. Cases there were in his experience when his confidence had been abused, when the opportunity for reformation, though held out with eager hands, had not

been grasped. But in this case every prayer of his heart had been answered. "Well, well, what do you think of that?" He turned to Kenward and Bruce who were both watching him.

"Personally I think I should lock up the silver." There was a cynical ring in Kenward's tone that rasped.

Father Kelly looked at him quietly. "Then you have small confidence in humanity, Mr. Wright?"

"None at all, have you?"

The direct question brought a new light into the priest's eyes. He came toward his questioner slowly, and all the weight of his experience spoke in his low, musical voice. "Well, Mr. Wright, I've lived sixty years in this gray, beautiful old world, and I believe His love is in every human heart, 'tis a part of Himself, and though it may be choked with weeds and evil thoughts, still He lives and reigns in every soul of man."

Something seemed to stir in the summer air as he finished, a subtle atmosphere of peace crept into the room.

Kenward shook his shoulders impatiently and laughed. "Yes, but it's your business to believe that; you're a priest, you know."

Color crept slowly into Father Kelly's face—there was a glint of steel in his eyes—at the tone. Flippancy he despised. A good joke found in him ready response—a human note always sounded a responding chord in his heart, but idle jests at life, duty, love, met his stern disapproval.

Bruce had turned to expostulate with Kenward, but the priest silenced him with a look. Then

his eyes looked piercingly at Kenward and his voice sank low. "And you're a man, Mr. Wright, and it should be your business to help the priest to foster and bring to light even the smallest particle of good in the lowliest of God's creatures."

There was silence in the room for a moment. Outside the wind had risen and was crooning the promise of a wild night; clouds had covered the moon, flying fast before the rising gale.

Kenward moved over to the arch, that led to the library, and shook his head. "Want to make a missionary of me, eh? No, thanks."

As the heavy curtains closed on him, the priest moved forward quickly, then paused. Some thought seemed to move him, a sensation, a feeling. He turned to Bruce who, leaning over the desk, questioned him with his eyes.

"Bruce, dear," said Father Kelly slowly, "I'm sorry, but I don't like your friend."

CHAPTER X

TWO SISTERS AND A SECRET

VERA'S mind was far from tranquil as she went up the stairs. The vague feeling of worry about her sister had crystalized to an anxious query in her mind. Alice's manner of arrival, her seclusion, and now the summons through Lesura, all combined to knit Vera's white forehead into sharp interrogations. She knocked on the door of her sister's room, which adjoined her own, and receiving no reply, gently opened it and looked in. There was no light in the apartment, but, by the faint beams from the half obscured moon, she could make out a figure standing at the open window.

"Alice," she called gently.

The girl turned with a smothered cry and put out both her hands as though warding off someone or some fancied danger.

"Who is it?" she asked, in a choked whisper.

"Vera, dear; did I frighten you?" and she came towards her quickly.

"Just a little." Their hands clasped and then the common heritage of blood sent them into each other's arms. For a long moment they clung together, then Vera suddenly put her hands on her sister's shoulders and held her away from herself.

"Alice, dear, you're crying."

"No, I'm not; really, I'm not."

Vera shook her head slowly. "You are, I felt a tear on my hand."

Alice turned from her to the window and leaned against the sill. Outside the wind had risen and the trees and shrubs made eery shadows on the lawn as they swayed before it. A flying wraith of clouds was in the sky, and the moon only showed at intervals. Beyond the river, low down on the horizon line, but climbing steadily toward the zenith, a black bulk crouched that promised storm. There was a hint of lightning to the northward.

"Dear girl," and Vera laid her hand gently on her sister's, "won't you tell me?"

"Tell you what?" Alice's voice was very low, but Vera felt the quiver of pain in its tone.

She paused a moment and slipped her arm about Alice's waist and laid her cheek close to hers. Somehow she felt that her sister needed her. The impression was vague. She could not put it into words, so she waited a moment in silence.

But Alice did not speak. At Vera's touch there was a slight recoil. Vera felt it, but checked her impulse to speak, to question. And so they stood there, one searching, questioning; the other half withdrawing as though she feared.

"That's a new way you are wearing your hair, dear," said Vera finally. "I can hardly see in this light, but I think it becomes you better than the old manner. She took a step away towards the electric button, but Alice, with a swift movement, caught her hand.

"Don't," she said quickly.

Vera clasped her other hand over her sister's and laughed. "Don't what, Alice?"

"I'd rather you wouldn't turn on the light."

"Why, dear?"

"Because—oh, it's a queer fancy, but you know I always loved to sit in the dark and look out of the window and watch the clouds race across the moon."

"You were always a strange girl, dear. What odd stories you used to invent. The clouds were castles in which we were to live, and the stars were the lamps we had placed to light our thousands of soldiers on their homeward march."

Neither spoke for a long moment. Then Alice clenched her hand and brought it down before her on the window sill.

"If we could only go back to those days, Vera! If we could throttle Time, make him reverse his glass, force him to give us back our yesterdays. Count each grain of sand that has slipped through his wrinkled fingers. Then, why then, we could throw away the black ones, the mistakes we had made and leave only those that were pure gold."

A sharp squall in the upper heavens drove the gathering storm battalions away, and the window was flooded with moonlight. Vera saw her sister's face etched against the dark background of the trees. It was writhing with pain, deep circles showed under the eyes, the lips were quivering as though some pent up anguish was striving to break forth. She wound her arms about her sister and all the love of years spoke through her lips.

"Alice, dear, you're suffering, suffering terribly. Do you suppose I don't know? Do you

think you can deceive me? You can't, dear, you can't. We've been too much to each other in the years that have gone. Do you think I've forgotten how we worked and played together way out there, just we two little motherless girls, alone on the prairie? How we kept the house, and one day you would be the housekeeper and I the servant; the next day we changed places, and always, dear, always, we worked for each other and for dear old dad, because—because—mother's last words to us were: 'Be good to daddy, he'll miss mother, miss her awfully, and, and you girls must take mother's place.' Alice, dear, think of those days and tell me what troubles you."

She had wound her arms around her sister; her face was pressed close to hers. For one moment Alice faltered, seemed to yield, and then she roughly broke away from the loving clasp and started toward the door.

"Alice." Vera's voice had a note of pain in it. She took a step toward her.

"Don't." It was a cry, low and full of pain. "You mustn't talk to me like that, Vera; not to-night. I can't stand it—I——" She grasped the back of the chair near her and fought for command of herself. Then, with one supreme effort, she steadied herself and put out her hand towards the door.

But Vera would not be denied. With a swift movement she was across the room and even as Alice turned the knob her own hand closed over it.

"No," she panted, breathlessly. "No, no, I

won't let you go like this. You're my sister. I know you're in pain; that you're suffering, and Alice, dear, you've got to tell me." She paused and peered through the darkness at the slim, gray figure before her. "Alice, do you hear?"

"Yes, Vera, I hear."

"You must tell me."

"I—I can't."

"Why?"

"Because, I don't know, I'm—I'm——" She threw out her hands with the despairing gesture of one who wanders in darkness, groping for some faint sign, some landmark to guide her wandering footsteps home.

Vera went slowly to her and caught both the outstretched hands. "Dear," she said, soothingly, "take time and think——"

Alice caught her breath sharply. "Think, as if I had done anything else for months past. All the way coming here I thought. I couldn't sleep. I haven't closed my eyes for two nights; and, oh, how I longed to see you, feel your arms about me."

Vera drew her close and both were silent for a moment.

"And then when I arrived, I couldn't bear to meet you. I—I just came up here and——" her voice died away to a whisper.

Vera held her sister to her and felt bewildered. Life had touched her lightly; only its lighter hues were known to her. Bruce had taken her into his heart and life; she felt only the joy of existence. Everything about her breathed peace, contentment, happiness. She knew little

of the dark pools of life where human souls fight and struggle against fate, against sin. Yet her instinct was so true, her sympathy so keen, that she divined something here that had never touched her before. Then she wondered if, after all, she were wise enough to deal with what she felt was a crisis in her sister's life. Perhaps—— She caught her breath as a sudden inspiration came to her.

"Alice, dear," she said, smoothing back the disordered brown hair and kissing her gently, "I want you to do something for me. There's a dear friend of Bruce's down stairs; talk to him. It's Father Kelly, and——" She paused, for Alice had shrunk away from her almost violently.

"No, no," she whispered. Then she grasped Vera's arm. "Promise me you won't tell him I'm here, or that I've talked like this; promise, Vera, please!"

"Of course not, dear, if you don't want me to; but, Alice, I wish you would."

Her sister shook her head violently.

"Then, dear, tell me what troubles you."

Alice fell to pacing the room, her head sunk on her breast, both hands locked behind her.

From below came the sound of a piano. Kenward was playing the latest rollicking vaudeville song to Kathleen in the music room.

Vera watched her sister and a great fear rose up and clutched at her heart. She knew how hard Alice had worked. There had been no vacation for her. Ambition in the girl burned like a white flame. To advance, to do, achieve, that had always been the rule of her life. It came

home to her the nervous force that a teacher must expend. Perhaps the frail physical self was rebelling, had broken under the constant strain. She caught her breath sharply and put out her hand as though to put away from her a presence that threatened.

"Alice, dear," she entreated again, "won't you speak, you're—you're frightening me.

The quiver in her voice brought Alice to her side. She put her arms about her and hushed her gently.

"Don't worry, Vera; it's—it's just nerves, that's all. I want a breath of fresh air." She caught up a fleecy wrap and threw it over her head and about her shoulders. "Go back to your guests, dear. I'll just take a turn in the grounds, and retire. I think I shall sleep soundly tonight. Tomorrow we'll talk."

"I wonder if I ought to let you go, Alice?"

"Of course. Kiss me. I can go down this way. You're a dear girl, Vera, and I love you."

Vera stood on the landing and watched her as she opened the side door and slipped through it into the grounds. Alice looked back at her sister and smiled up at her, but there was a pitiful tremor in her hands, and her face showed pale under the hall light.

Vera watched her, and was conscious of the same vague feeling of oppression. She lifted her hand to her face and stared after her.

"What can it be that troubles Alice?" she asked herself.

CHAPTER XI

THE WISDOM OF FATHER KELLY

BRUCE stared at Father Kelly as he delivered his opinion regarding Kenward.

"Don't like Ken!" he cried, amazed. "Why, he's the best fellow in the world."

The priest nodded sagely. "He may be so, but he has a mighty fine way of concealing it."

Bruce shook his finger accusingly at his friend. "You're angry, Father."

"I'm not." The tone was one of indignant denial. "The cloth I wear forbids me to give way to anger." His face grew pensive with a great desire. "It would do me a world of good to take Mr. Wright gently by the arm, lead him out on the lawn"—his right hand seemed to close unconsciously—"and quietly beat the head off him——" Bruce coughed as a gentle reminder of mundane things, and Father Kelly looked at his clenched hand, then spread it abroad with a large and an all-embracing gesture as he added grimly: "But I am not angry."

"But you're very human," added Bruce, laughing.

Father Kelly started to reply, but paused as Charley Harrow, with his head down, a settled expression of gloom upon his face, came into the cheerful study with Lee convoying him.

"Here he is, Father Kelly," and the boy's tone was triumphant.

Charley sighed in a resigned way. "Want me, Bruce?"

"Yes, Charley." Bruce nodded to Lee, who went through the arch with a backward look of keen enjoyment. "This is my old friend and tutor, the Reverend Brian Kelly, Mr. Harrow."

The young man bowed mournfully and sighed, "Glad to know you, sir."

"The pleasure is mutual, Mr. Harrow." The priest was studying this new acquaintance carefully.

Bruce smiled at them both and parted the curtains at the arched opening. "I want you to talk freely to Father Kelly, Charley." He nodded quietly and the draperies closed upon him.

Young Harrow sighed again, and made a wry face. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the priest move over to the desk, that occupied the center of the room, and deliberately draw a heavy armchair toward it.

"The usual thing, I suppose," he muttered, settling his chin in his collar and squaring his shoulders as one does who is about to face an ordeal. "Going to talk about my soul or something of that kind; then give me a lecture on religion——"

"Young man," broke in Father Kelly, briskly, "do you think John L. Sullivan in his prime could have whipped Jack Johnson?"

Young Harrow turned with a gasp and caught at the back of a chair for support.

"Wha—what? What did you say?" he asked, after a pause.

Father Kelly leaned back in his chair smiling. He was accustomed to this astonishment in those

who did not realize, that the priest must first be a man with a heart full of universal sympathy, and complete understanding of all that makes up life.

"Could the old lion of the ring have faced Johnson?" he queried musingly. "It's a mighty big question, so take your time before you answer."

Charley passed his hand nervously over his forehead. A priest, to his untaught mind had always meant a long face and conversation limited to theology. He looked at the wholesome, clear cut features before him and stammered: "Are you a priest?"

"Wouldn't you know that to look at me, lad?"

Charley shook his head slowly. "Not by your face; it's ruddy and smiling. You look as though you were happy!"

"I am, praise be." There was positiveness in Father Kelly's tone. "Shouldn't a man be happy whose life work is to serve mankind?"

It was a new point of view to the young man. He nodded slowly, then took a step toward the priest as a new thought came to him. "But I'm not of your faith."

Father Kelly waved his hand, smilingly. This too was an objection he had met often. Then his face grew spiritual and his voice filled the ample room.

"And what difference does that make? I'll tell you. None at all. Lack of trust in the Creator's power has, in the past, put up bars between mankind. But today it is dawning upon the whole world, that we are all one large family journeying on together, and that the one great,

eternal faith is a belief in the power of God's love."

The soft cadence of his voice was like an anthem: it stirred the hidden depths of life.

Charley took a step forward, drawn by the broad humanity, the simple force of one who knew.

"That's a great thought, Father Kelly."

The priest looked up at him quietly and smiled. His kindly eyes studied the young man. "You believe I'm human then, just a man like yourself?"

Charley's hand went out and clasped that of the priest. "I like you," he said heartily.

"Thank you, lad; I like you. Will you talk to me?"

Down into the chair facing the priest dropped Charley Harrow. The frown was gone from his face and he was smiling. "You bet I will."

"The mighty Sullivan had a wonderful right hand," mused Father Kelly, "and our friend Jack Johnson depends upon his upper cut; those are the factors in the equation, my boy, and what's the answer?"

"Father Kelly," cried the now thoroughly interested Charley Harrow, "you know something about boxing."

"Whisper," and the priest leaned toward him confidentially: "I have a large and growing class in the manly art of self defense in my parish here. Come to my tent on Wednesday night and I'll show you some championship timber."

"I'll be there, Father!"

"Take Mickey Hurley," went on the priest.

"A great lad, his footwork is wonderful; sometimes I think he has wings on them; and his left hand punch—well, it's very deceiving." He broke off abruptly and changed his subject. "What's on your mind, lad?"

Charley pushed his chair back and frowned. "Nothing," he said, gloomily.

"What talk have you?" cried the priest cheerily. "Come now, don't close up like a clam at low water. Talk to me!"

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"It's a secret sorrow, Father; it's locked in here!"

"Oho!" and the Father's eyes were sparkling now. "Maybe I have the key."

"No," despondently; "no one has it."

"Is that so?" He brought the tips of his fingers together and looked at the young man steadily. "Miss Vera tells me you won't eat, or sleep; that you go out of nights and gaze at the moon. Yes, yes—well——" He bent over the desk and darted a question at him swiftly: "*What's her name?*"

Mr. Charles Harrow came up out of his chair as though an electric current had suddenly passed through him. "Eh, why, why——"

Father Kelly leaned back in his chair and smiled with the wisdom gained by many such delvings into human nature. "You heard me," he said, firmly. "*What's her name?* Aha! did I turn the key on that secret sorrow—yes or no?"

Charley fumbled for his handkerchief and blushed furiously. "Why—I—— How the

devil!" He checked himself quickly, the exclamation had somehow slipped through his lips. "I beg your pardon, Father Kelly," he stammered.

The Father, contrary to expectation, did not wince. Instead he smiled broadly. "Sure and you needn't, my boy. Why should you? I'm fighting the devil every day, so why should I shiver at the mention of his name?"

Charley shook his head. "I don't know."

"Are you going to tell me *her name*, lad?"

"How did you know, Father?"

"Young man," and the priest's smile was wonderful in its all-embracing kindliness. "I can see you're sound. There's color in your cheeks—light in your eyes. Well, in my experience, when a healthy lad leaves his dinner and goes gazing at the moon—there's always a shirtwaist somewhere about." He paused with an air of finality and waited, but no reply came. Charley was regarding him nervously. "Are her eyes blue?" asked the priest softly.

At the words Charley broke into voluble words. This man knew how to unlock hearts and tongues.

"Yes, Father, blue as the heavens above. Her face—no artist would dare paint; its beauty would stun him; hair like the sunset; a smile no man ever saw before, and a voice—like the chime of golden bells."

The priest smiled and nodded. "You've got it bad," he decided. "There's only one cure."

"What's that, Father?"

Father Kelly checked off the ingredients of his prescription slowly: "A plain gold ring, a few

minutes with me, after the banns are cried from the altar, and a shower of rice and old shoes as you drive away to a flat in Harlem."

Charley drew a deep breath. Paradise was being painted for him by his new friend. Then he caught his breath sharply and rose to his feet. "But I don't know where she is, Father!"

"You don't know? Well, well, that's bad, my boy; very, very bad!"

Charley shook his head despondently; the old gloom was on his face. "She was in the mountains this Summer, and then one day she—she went."

The priest followed his gesture, which described the arc of an angel's flight. "She did?"

"She did," and Charley turned away.

"Why didn't you follow her, you young gossoon?" Father Kelly rose excitedly to his feet.

"I didn't know where she came from or where she went."

"Ah, then, you must have cared a lot about her."

"So much that I forgot to ask her."

Father Kelly leaned on the desk and smiled sagely. "You have the worst case I ever saw. But," and he came quite near the young man, "you can tell me her name?" He waited for a moment and then as no reply came, he demanded with some asperity: "Man alive, you know her name, don't you?"

Charley nodded, but backed closer to the broad French window. "Yes, but I don't know that I ought to tell it—because—well—ah, let me think!" and he darted out into the shubbery.

Father Kelly lifted both hands in the air. "Let him think," he repeated. Then he gazed after the retreating form of the young man and shook his head. "There he goes, as proud as a boy with his first pair of red topped boots."

The curtains at the arch rustled and Kathleen came into the room a little timidly. She made a charming picture as she stood there in relief against their warm red background. Slowly she came over and laid her hand on her uncle's shoulder. "Shouldn't we be starting for home, Uncle Brian?" she asked, quietly.

"Soon now, my colleen." Father Kelly's voice was very low and tender and the old Irish word was a caress from his lips. He loved this motherless girl. She had lived with him since her parents died and her education had been a source of joy and gratification to him.

Kathleen was accustomed to Uncle Brian's moods. She realized that his mind was very busy over some problem, and so she went to the other broad French window that fronted on the river and roadway and peered out. The weather was threatening. Beyond the Hudson the low tumuli of cloud bank had risen and covered the western sky. A low growl now and then came from the depths of the inky masses. There was lightning at the lower edge.

"Shouldn't we be starting for home?" she hazarded.

"Soon now, dear, soon." But he made no movement to go.

She shook her head a little ruefully, for she knew how impossible it was to bring his mind back to earth once it was busy on a problem.

Something in her tone made him turn and look at her more attentively. He put out his hand and there was a note of anxiety in his voice. "Katy, dear, I've been observing you of late. Is anything troubling you?"

At his question she faltered a little and her eyes dropped. Suddenly she became vitally interested in a seam of the simple blue dress she wore. "What makes you ask that, Uncle Brian?"

"Yourself, dear. Sure, there was a time when your laugh echoed through the house all day, and you were so brimful of life, that it spoke in your eyes and sounded in your voice, until my old heart was lifted up with joy." He watched her for a moment and then added slowly: "'Tis not so now, dear!"

The seam upon Kathleen's dress was surely a cause of anxiety to her. Her eyes were fixed on it and her slender fingers were gathering it, plaiting it into a new creation of her fancy. Father Kelly noticed that the fingers trembled a little as she answered plaintively: "Well, sure, times change, and—and we change with them."

He considered this a moment, thoughtfully. "Yes, there's truth in what you say." Her fingers tried a new arrangement of the seam and her eyes were still lowered. He came a little nearer. "Can't you tell Uncle Brian what it is that troubles you?"

There was a world of tender solicitude in his voice.

Kathleen looked up into his kindly face and with a sob threw her arms about his neck and buried her face on his broad shoulder.

"Murder!" cried Father Kelly, startled out of his accustomed calm. "What's this I've started?" He held her close to him and listened for some word she might drop as a clue to this sudden burst of tears. But Kathleen only clung to him and murmured inarticulate nothings.

"I didn't mean," she sobbed; "that is, I did in a way; but—but—not that way. I—I went and oh—oh—it was dreadful."

"Yes, yes," soothed Father Kelly, patting softly on her shoulder; "it was worse than that; it was awful."

Kathleen raised her tear stained face and gazed at her uncle. "Don't you follow me, Uncle Brian?"

"Yes," replied the priest, "I follow you like a hungry dog after a butcher's wagon, ravenously but unsatisfactorily." He looked at her again and shook his head. "Upon my word, Katy, I think you're crazy!"

"I'm not, Uncle Brian, but *he* may be."

Father Kelly turned to her quickly as she backed away from him toward the arch. "So!" he said; "there's a *he* in it, is there?"

Kathleen nodded and blushed and stammered.

"Tell me his name." Father Kelly's tone was judicial.

Kathleen blushed more furiously and edged nearer the arch. "Why—I—I—I——!"

"Kathleen O'Connor!" The interruption came directly back of Father Kelly. Charley Harrow had come in from the garden and stood looking, not at the priest but at his niece. Kathleen clasped both her hands and took a step forward.

"Charley Harrow!" Her tone was ecstatic; over her face there crept an expression of relief.

Father Kelly looked from one to the other and slowly a great light flooded his mind. "He couldn't eat. She's been pining," he murmured, half unconsciously. "Both in the mountains this Summer—and—and——" He threw up his hands literally and going to the broad window became intensely occupied with the weather, but from the corner of his sharp eye he saw and reveled in the meeting of these two young people.

Both had suddenly become self conscious. Kathleen's attention was directed to the troublesome seam in her dress. Charley Harrow started toward the lady of his dreams, the one he had pined and sighed for—then stopped suddenly. Somehow he was supremely aware that he was not looking his best. Wasn't his collar rumpled? He felt it was—and his hair. What a sight he must be—just now when he wanted to look immaculate. But she was there and perhaps she would understand. He tripped over the Persian rug before the desk on his way across the room. It seemed miles to him. Then *she* looked up at him with those wonderful blue eyes and he gasped at the look of complete surrender in them.

"How do you do?" he questioned, decorously. The voice did not sound like his own at all.

"Quite well, thank you, Mr. Harrow!" As always, the woman bore her part more bravely than the man.

Then a long pause.

Father Kelly put his handkerchief over his smiling mouth and peered out at the weather.

Words had left Charley. He shifted nervously from one foot to the other.

"How do you do?" Kathleen did her feminine best to help him.

"Quite well; I'm feeling fine now. Yes, and I'm feeling better and better every minute."

She smiled up at him entrancingly and all the flood of words pent up in him burst forth.

"I thought I never should see you again. I—I didn't know you were going so soon."

"But didn't I tell you, Mr. Harrow?"

"Tell me? No!"

"I meant to."

"You didn't."

"I've worried."

"Heavens, so have I."

"I wrote four letters to the Cliff House!"

"I didn't receive them."

"No?"

"No."

"I'll kill that clerk."

"Did you try to find——"

"I've sat up nights thinking——"

"So have I."

"You have?"

"Every night."

"Oh, oh——"

"Yes; I feel that way and now—now——"

The curtains on the arch closed on them. Their voices died away and the library door shut with a bang. Evidently no third person was wanted there.

Father Kelly turned in the window embrasure and clung to the curtains weakly. The rapid in-

terchange of questions, answers, interjections had sounded like meaningless jargon to his ears. He looked all about the room.

"Help!" he said, and dropped into a broad arm chair.

CHAPTER XII

THE MAN IN THE SHRUBBERY

VERA ran down the stairway and intercepted Bruce as he came through the curtains. She had been thinking deeply and had reached the conclusion to wait until morning, or until her guests had gone, before questioning her sister again. Bruce took her hand, smiling, and then something in Father Kelly's manner deflected the current of his thoughts, and he came over to the desk, looking about the room curiously.

"Did you see Charley, Father?" he inquired.

Vera smiled and laid her hand on the priest's arm. She had forgotten her suggestion that their friend should try to probe that young man's gloomy manner.

Father Kelly looked up and nodded grimly. "I did so, and Charley saw me." Then he added, mysteriously: "Yes, and that's not all Charley saw, either!"

Vera frowned a question at Bruce over the priest's unconscious head.

"What do you mean?" asked Bruce.

Charley came through the curtained arch, his face flushed and smiling, his eyes dancing.

"I say, Bruce, old man," he called, cheerily, with a nod to include Vera, "you won't mind if I order up a little bite from the kitchen—fact is, I'm starving; eh, what?"

Bruce surveyed him with a stare of amazement. "No, Charley, go as far as you like."

"Thanks; knew you wouldn't object. Great night tonight, isn't it, eh?" He tossed his handkerchief in the air, caught it dexterously, waved it at them joyously; then hummed a bar of rag-time melody descriptive of the heated atmosphere imminent in a certain nameless town and fairly ran through the curtained arch.

Bruce looked after him with a wondering stare, and then at Vera. She drew her eyebrows into a straight line of extreme perplexity and shook her head.

"Wonderful!" commented Bruce.

"Marvelous!" echoed Father Kelly.

"You've done a very wonderful thing with that boy," went on Bruce.

"Yes," nodded the priest. "But it wasn't I who did it."

Vera asked the question for both Bruce and herself: "Then what has made such a change in him?"

Father Kelly smiled and bestowed on them a grave, clerical wink. "Charley has found the rib he lost."

Vera and Bruce exchanged a puzzled look before he inquired: "What are you talking about, Father?"

The priest stroked his chin thoughtfully and answered the question with another: "You said this place was Eden, didn't you?"

"Yes, but——"

"Well, my dear young friends, Adam lost a rib in his Garden of Eden and found it turned into

Eve. Charley found his lost rib, tonight, in this room, and, faith, 'it has hair like the sunset; a smile no man ever saw before, and a voice like golden bells.' " He paused and surveyed them, smiling.

Bruce shook his head in a bewildered way, but Vera's keener mind caught a hint of the hidden meaning.

"Father Kelly," she cried, delightedly, "do you mean——"

The priest nodded. "My niece, Kathleen."

"Hello!" cried Bruce, as it dawned on him. "Those two——"

From the library came the laughing tones of Kathleen as a servant opened the door with a supply of food for Charley.

"Mr. Harrow, are you going to eat all those sandwiches?"

"Yes," and the young man's voice was almost boisterous. "I'm awfully hungry!"

Father Kelly listened with hand raised. He turned to Bruce and Vera as the closing of the library door shut out whatever followed. He nodded wisely. "See now. His appetite came back almost as soon as he saw Kathleen, and he's eating his head off in there."

"I'm glad," said Bruce heartily, and Vera echoed the sentiment.

"So am I," replied Father Kelly, gripping Bruce's hand warmly. "He's a fine lad, or I've lost my eyesight; and Kathleen, well, she's an Irish girl, and you know what they sing in the old country." He hummed the words of an old song:

"Kathleen's eyes are Irish,
Kathleen's eyes are blue;
Kathleen's eyes are Irish eyes
Irish eyes are True."

He looked at them for a moment, and then added: "And that's what Charley is thinking in there now."

Like an echo to his song came the bars of a music hall melody from the library, the voices of Kathleen and Charley blending in the refrain.

The three listened, Father Kelly beating time with one hand. A horrible discord brought an exclamation from Vera. Charley had failed to reach the exact note of the tenor part.

Father Kelly shook his head and smiled as he went toward the library door. "We must forgive them," he said. "Sure, 'tis love that drives them off the key." He paused and listened as the clock on the mantel chimed the half hour. "Half after ten; we must be going."

But Vera interposed swiftly: "No, you and Kathleen are to remain the night with us."

"Yes," said Bruce. "We must have a talk about the young people tomorrow, Father."

As if to reinforce their argument, there was a low mutter of thunder from outside.

Vera went to the window and looked out. "You must stay," she urged. "It's going to storm."

"Well," replied the priest, smiling, "I'll accept your hospitality most thankfully." He drew aside the curtains of the arch and looked back at them,

laughing. "Who knows, we may find another of Charley's ribs in the morning?"

Vera waved her hand and smiled at him as he went, but Bruce's next words caused a little cloud of anxiety to cover her face. She came towards him as he inquired: "How did you find your sister, dear?"

"Alice has changed, Bruce; she's worn, looks pale—nervous——"

Bruce felt the quiver in her voice and drew her to him very gently. "Won't she come down?" he asked, and laid his hand upon the door as though he meant to go up to her.

A figure passed slowly by the open French window and Bruce saw her. "Alice!" he started to call, but Vera interposed quickly:

"Yes, it's Alice, but she doesn't want to meet anyone. She's gone for a walk in the grounds. Oh, Bruce, she looks so worn and nervous, I'm—I'm worried about her."

Her husband patted her on the shoulder reassuringly. "Now, now," he comforted. "Alice is only tired after her long journey. A good night's rest is all she needs. Come, we'll go and meet Charley and Kathleen. Just imagine, that was all that ailed the beggar—a girl. Why, hello, Ken," he broke off suddenly, as their friend came through the curtains. "Began to think you had found us slow and retired."

Kenward laughed. "No; been having an exciting time congratulating Charley."

"Exactly what I'm on my way to do," and Vera nodded to them as she went towards the library.

"Came for another cigar, Bruce," said Ken-

ward. "Notice my burglarious instinct," and he opened the *escritoire* in the corner and took one from the box." I have some, but your brand appeals to me." He clipped the end deliberately and looked about him for a light. "Got over that foolish feeling you had about an unknown enemy?"

The smile left his friend's face. He shook his head grimly. "Far from it, Ken. He's there all right, hiding behind his brokers."

"Must be a crafty man."

"Yes, all that—but he's a coward, for he doesn't fight in the open."

"If you're sure of what you say," and Kenward's voice was very earnest, "You ought to be very careful."

Bruce nodded. "He won't catch me napping again," he said. "I tell no one my plans for the market now; no one save Vera."

He shrugged his shoulders as though dismissing business for the moment, and passed through the curtains at the archway. As he opened the door of the library, Vera was leaning over the arm of Father Kelly's chair and smiling at the counsel he was imparting to Charley and Kathleen, who sat at the large table opposite them.

"'Tis the vanity of us all," said the priest, "to believe that we know life. 'When the hair falls out,' said some wise old fellow, 'wisdom flows in'; but I tell you 'tis not that way at all. As we grow older, we grow more foolish; we think we know, and then some gossoon"—he shook his finger at young Harrow menacingly—"comes along and whirroo—away goes years of theory."

Bruce joined the laughing group about the table and put his hand on Vera's arm.

"Was it the gossoon in this case that defied theory, Father, or"—he looked wickedly down at Kathleen—"was it the colleen?"

"You remind me," returned the priest, "that no investigator should ever forget that rule of the wise Frenchman, who said: 'Toujours serchez la femme.'"

Vera pinched his ear. "That's a libel on my sex, Father Kelly," she said.

"Ah," retorted the priest, "your action is symbolic of your sex, ma'am; you buzz and then nip mankind."

"Oh, ho!" and Vera retreated from him in pretended horror. "Did you hear that? Kathleen, shall we use violence?" She grasped her fan like a deadly weapon and seemed looking for the most vulnerable point to attack.

Kather Kelly put up his hands in a gesture of entreaty, for Kathleen was advancing on him with her eyes full of mischief. "Two against one feeble old man; is that the feminine idea of fair play? See now," he implored, "I qualify it—some of your sex, I meant. Present company always suspected—that is—I mean—excepted."

Vera laughed and gave him her hand. "Forgiven," she said.

"Well, anyway," suggested Father Kelly, covertly. "It was Bruce that started the ruction, so if anyone is to be slain, ladies, choose him."

"Where's Kenward?" asked Vera, suddenly.

Bruce looked about him. "Thought he came in

with me. Kenward!" he called, and went toward his study.

He found Kenward seated at his desk, the telephone receiver at his ear.

"Hello, what's up, old man?" queried Bruce. "Anything broke?"

His friend looked up quickly, and it struck Bruce that he seemed a trifle worried.

"Don't know; New York just called me, and——" He broke off sharply and spoke through the 'phone: "Hello, that you, Benson? Yes, this is Wright—yes, Kenward Wright. Oh, all right, I'll be in tonight about that matter. When? Why——" He put his hand over the transmitter and looked up quickly. "When's the next train into town, Bruce?"

Bruce looked at his watch and answered, with the readiness of the commuter whose peace in life depends upon his knowledge of train schedules and the number of feet he can cover per second. "It's eleven ten. There's a train in at eleven fifty-five, one at twelve twenty, another at twelve fifty."

Kenward nodded his thanks and spoke over the wire. "I'll be in on the eleven fifty-five from here."

He hung up the receiver with more than ordinary care. One could see his mind was busy with some problem.

"What is it?" asked Vera, who came from the library. Something in the air told her of the unusual.

"Ken's got to go into town," replied Bruce. He had pressed a button on the wall and turned to Lee, who entered in answer to the summons.

"That's too bad," complained Vera, and this was echoed by Father Kelly, who had followed her to the study.

"Sorry," replied Kenward, buttoning up his coat, "but I've simply got to go."

"Mr. Kenward's hat——" began Bruce, but Lee had anticipated him and came forward with the article; also a mackintosh.

"Guess you'll need this, Mr. Wright," he said.

Kenward nodded as he put it on.

"My car's in the repair shop," regretted Bruce.

"Sorry; hitch up a horse for you."

But his friend shook his head. "No, I can make it easy; like the walk. Good night to you all. I'll be back in a day or so." And he went out quickly through the French window.

The storm was nearer now. Buffets of the gale struck the house like blows from some giant's hand. The lightning was vivid; each flash lit up the grounds and was apparent, even in the brightly illumined study.

Father Kelly drew back the curtains and looked after Kenward thoughtfully. "I hope the rain holds off until he reaches the station," he said.

Kenward's abrupt departure seemed to have thrown a little check upon their good spirits. No one spoke for a moment. Over in the corner near the arch Kathleen and Charley whispered together. Vera moved about the study restlessly; she found it impossible to be still. Bruce looked up from the book he had opened and watched her gravely. She saw his eyes on her and colored under their steady gaze.

"The storm makes me nervous," she said. "Don't you all think it time to retire?"

A little chorus of assent followed her suggestion. Lee began to close the windows and to draw the curtains; Lesura opened the door that led to the stairs.

"If you please, Mrs. Wilton," Kathleen came over to her hostess slowly. She seemed about to say something, then hesitated and paused.

Vera's hand went out to her with ready sympathy. "What is it, dear?" she asked.

Father Kelly came toward Vera smiling; he understood what Kathleen desired. "If you please, Vera," he said quietly, "we have a little custom in our home that Kathleen is used to, one she misses tonight."

"What is it, Father?"

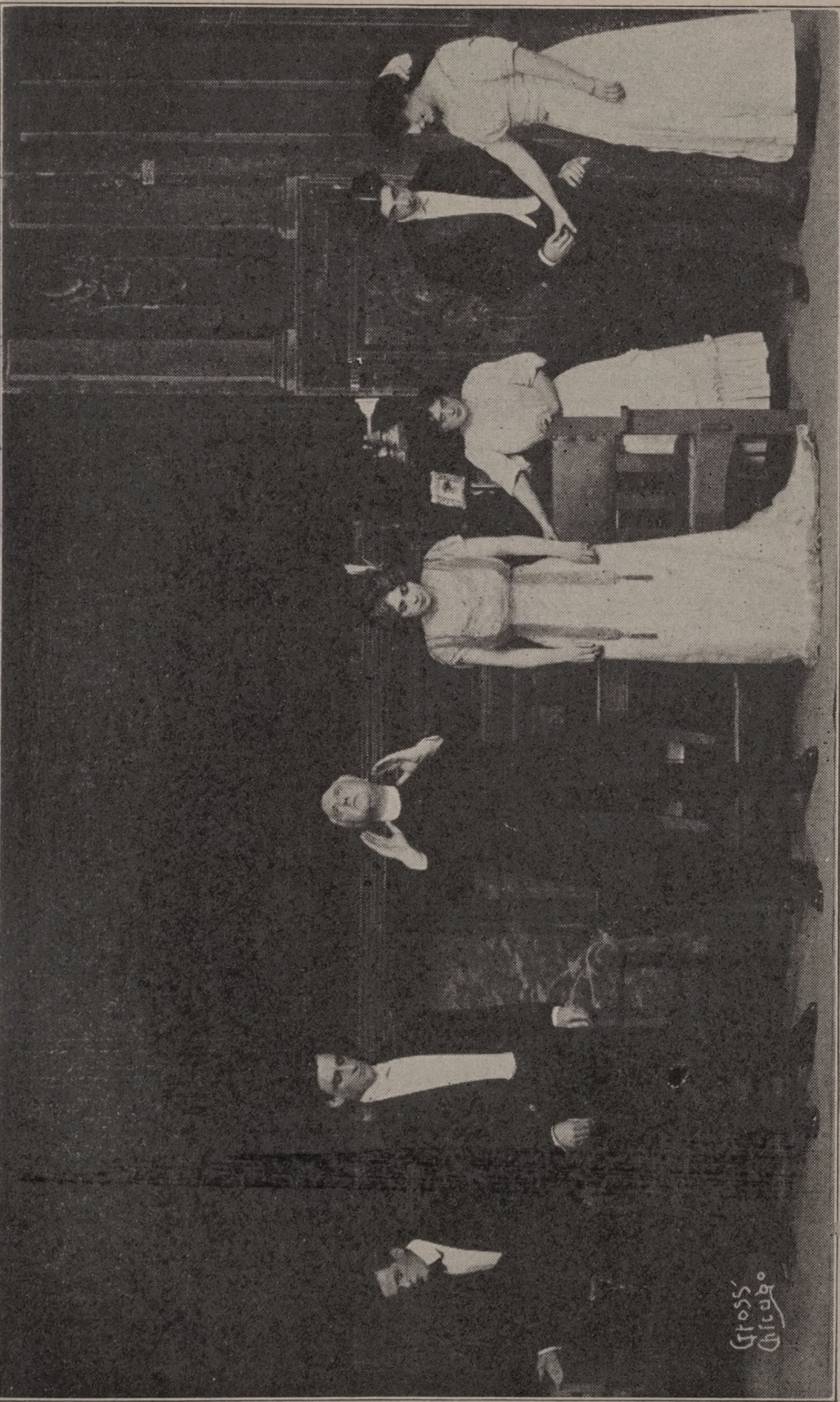
"When the day is over and we are going to our rest, I always call my little household together for a good night blessing."

Vera put her hand on his arm and smiled. "Won't you do that now, Father?"

"If the master of the house doesn't object."

"Not at all," said Bruce heartily; then he qualified his assent—"but, I don't believe——"

The priest turned to him quickly and raised his hand. "Bruce, lad, don't say it! Who knows what the night holds for any of us?" He closed his eyes reverently and the music of his voice filled the room: "May God's blessing rest on this house and all of us tonight—forgive if any of us have strayed—and grant that the night may bring us new strength to love and serve Thee always. Amen."



Gross
Chicago

“Forgive if any of us have strayed”

Vera laid her hand upon his. "I thank you, Father," she said.

"Upon my word, Father, I wish I did believe!" and Bruce's voice told of his earnestness.

The priest turned and caught his friend's hand. Vera gave a little cry and started forward. It was what she had hoped for, the one great desire of her life that her husband's doubts might disappear, that he might have faith.

"Lad," said Father Kelly, and there was a quiver of longing in his tone; "you've made a beginning, 'tis the desire must come first, the rest is in His hands." His lips moved silently for a moment, then he smiled and looked about him. "Will some one show an old man where he is to lay his head?"

Lee will do that, Father Kelly," said Bruce, and while Vera showed Kathleen to her room with Lesura up the stairs, the priest passed through the arch to the other wing with Charley and Lee. At the door of the library Father Kelly paused. "I think I'll browse among the books for an hour maybe," he said. "My room, ah, at the end of the hall, ye say? Well, just turn the light on there and leave the door open. Good night!"

Bruce alone in the study gave a last look about, then turned the switch, near the stairway door that threw off the lights. As he did so, a vivid flash of lightning lighted the room. Bruce gave a quick start and went to the window. He looked out until another flash illuminated the grounds. Then he shook his head impatiently and laughed as he went up the stairs.

"I'm getting nervous," he said smiling. "Just for a moment I thought I saw someone at that window."

He passed into his room and the door closed softly on him. Then silence held the entire house.

Outside the rain had come and fell in great sheets. The wind had fallen and now crooned about the corners and the eaves. From above the thunder still rolled, but more distant, the lightning was less vivid.

In the library Father Kelly dozed over an old black letter volume he had found.

Upstairs, in the room adjoining Vera's, her sister, Alice, lay upon the bed fully dressed, her eyes were closed, one hand was thrown over her head. She seemed asleep, but underneath the white spread thrown over her she was fully dressed.

She was not asleep. Her eyes were closed, but she was listening, waiting.

And outside the window of the study, in the shelter of the shrubbery, there crouched—A MAN.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE SILENT HOUSE

SLEEP did not come to Vera readily. The restlessness she had felt earlier in the evening returned with greater force, once she laid her head upon the pillow.

Over and over she tried to put all thought away, to make her mind a blank, but something seemed to drag her back to consciousness. Bruce had told her before retiring the exact details of the coup he expected to execute on the Exchange next day. It was a bold one, and she smiled as she thought how typical it was of his direct methods. She asked herself if this was not the cause of her wakefulness, and smiling up into the darkness denied it. No, her confidence in her husband's strength and mental power was boundless.

She put her hand gently on his, and felt with a thrill that even in deep slumber his fingers closed on hers. Perfect love, perfect faith, perfect understanding, she thought to herself and a great wave of thankfulness came over her. Surely God in His own good time would bring a man like Bruce to faith in Him. She closed her eyes and a deep peace came over her. Little by little her restlessness left her, the tired nerves relaxed, sleep, the most blessed gift to mankind, was stealing close to her, whispering gently in her ear that all was well.

Then suddenly something invisible seemed to

touch her. She put out her hand blindly in the darkness, almost as though she expected it to encounter a tangible, physical shape. Her eyes were wide open now and staring, yet she heard nothing, saw nothing. There was only the moaning of the wind outside and the ghostly creak of a loose shutter. And yet she felt an impulse, an urge, a feeling she could not explain. Something invisible seemed impelling her to rise—to—— she did not know what. Fight against it as she would, the feeling persisted. It could not be Alice. She had looked in upon her sister before retiring and found her, as she thought, sleeping peacefully.

Then what was this sensation that she felt in every nerve?

In desperation she rose quietly, threw a loose silk kimono over her and made her way to Alice's room. She tried the door and found it open; it was not even latched. Startled at this, she entered, and felt before she switched on the light, that Alice was not there.

The room was in disorder. Her sister's traveling bag was wide open, its contents scattered all about the room. With a vague gesture of helplessness, she put her hand to her head and tried to think what this could mean. And then a low sound caught her ear, something like a moan. Quickly she turned off the light and groped her way in the darkness to the head of the stairs. Once she paused and again she heard the same sound, clearer now. Yes, it was a moan, low and faint, but unmistakable.

The heavily carpeted stairs gave no sound as

she descended them lightly. At their foot she paused. Then she opened the door and stepped into the study, and in that instant it came to her in a blinding flash of intuition, that her sister was there, but not alone.

Someone was with Alice!

Who?

She leaned against the door and thought swiftly. The room was an inky pool of darkness, but she caught the faint, elusive trace of something near the further window. She paused a moment, and then it came to her that Alice had worn a gray dress. Quickly she started forward and spoke aloud.

"There is someone in this room," she said; "someone, Alice——" In her excitement her hand crashed down upon the keys of the piano. They jangled, a horrible discord.

But Alice was there.

At the sound, she turned wildly toward the window on the other side of the room.

Vera saw that both windows were open, as she caught her sister by both hands.

Something glided out of the other window into the storm, a wraith, a shadow; in her excitement she could not be sure, for Alice tore her hands free and ran out through the window that faced the river.

"Alice," she cried with a sob, and would have followed her, but at that moment she heard her husband's voice.

"Vera," he called, and then again, "Vera!"

She turned with a cry and plunged headlong into someone who caught both her hands firmly.

"Vera," said a low, stern voice. "What are you doing here?"

It was Father Kelly.

She heard her husband again. He was descending the stairs. In his voice there was a note of suspicion.

"Vera," he said again.

She gave a cry and shrunk closer to Father Kelly. Her sister, Alice, here, under her roof, and someone who had come there to meet her. The shame of it shook her with a passion of sobs.

"Father," she moaned, "I can't tell you—or—or Bruce, only help me, help me. I—I——"

Bruce dashed the door; at the foot of the stairs, wide open and entered the room. He had thrown a loose robe about him.

"What's that?" he demanded. "Who's there? I'll know—I'll——"

His hand found the switch, and with one turn the room was flooded with light. Then he started back in astonishment, for Father Kelly stood facing him quietly. Vera crouched behind the heavy curtains, where Father Kelly had placed her, listened for his next word.

"Father Kelly," said Bruce, "you here—*alone?*"

The priest took a step toward him and paused. "Yes, Bruce, dear lad," he replied calmly; "as you see, ALONE!"

CHAPTER XIV

A QUESTION OF ERIN

AND morning dawned as though even Nature understood how close had Tragedy come to the Eden household. A leaden sky canopied an atmosphere of fog and chilly winds. The sodden earth tried to free itself from the sheets of rain that had fallen, but the Sun hid its face and without the help of its beams the ground was powerless. Every gutter and runway flowed a river, the trees now and then shook themselves, as the dank wind whistled through their branches, and deluged the unhappy passer-by. The cozy house, from the outside, looked deserted and forbidding. Soaked awnings dripped dismally upon the flooded verandas. The loggia and arbor, wind swept and rain soaked, presented the appearance of a stranded wreck. Upon the little hill at their back the thicket of birch saplings was a tangled labyrinth of broken branches and twisted tree trunks.

With the first streaks of dawn there came workmen up the hill from the station. They had arrived on the early morning train in obedience to Vera's orders. Lee admitted them at the servants' entrance and showed them the way to Bruce's study. Then he left them there, as she had asked him to do.

Quietly they worked for quite two hours, and

before the house was stirring, they went as silently as they had come. Only the younger of the three, when they stopped in the kitchen to enjoy a cup of coffee before taking the train for the city, was talkative. He was a fine stalwart workman, and as he stood by the table he looked about him curiously and said:

"That's a mighty strange present to give a man," and he nodded toward the study where they had been working. Then he drank his coffee reflectively and added, "But your Mrs. Wilton is all right, you hear me?"

The other men with him nodded, and so they went down the hill to their train.

Lee had received written directions from Vera. They were on a tiny card, and read:

"Lee:

"Please see the workmen are shown to Mr. Wilton's study and that they are undisturbed. I don't want anyone to see my present to Mr. Wilton."

That was Vera's gracious way of dealing with her household. No orders, no commands, just a simple request on a card in her own delicate handwriting.

Lee had carefully followed the request. Now he went to the study just to see that everything was in order. The workmen were worthy to be called craftsmen, for they had left scarcely a trace of their presence. Lee glanced about the room sharply and noted that the curtains on the west window were closely drawn. Across them was a broad band of purple ribbon.

"It's back of that, this present for Mr. Wil-

ton," he said, and fell to musing over what it could be. Then his quick eyes noted a few tiny shavings near the curtain's edge, others down the center of the room. He shook his head and went for the carpet sweeper.

Father Kelly came in through the other window as Lee rolled the sweeper energetically. He did not seem to see the boy and fell to pacing the room slowly.

"Morning, Father Kelly," said Lee.

"Eh, what's that!"

Lee paused in his work and then realized that a change had taken place in his friend, since he bade him good night only a few hours ago. His face was drawn and rather pale, his eyes looked heavy; there was about him some indefinable air of worry, perplexity, uncertainty. The boy stared at first and an affectionate query of solicitude came to his lips. He shut them in a close, tight line, however, and shook his head.

"I just said good morning," he replied.

"Yes, lad, yes!" The priest took off his hat with a preoccupied air and handed it rather absently to his young friend. Lee took it instantly and placed it on the rack just beyond the broad arched opening to the hallway. He noticed the Father's fingers were a little unsteady.

"Yes, of course," said the priest. "Good morning, my boy. Busy with your duties, I see."

Lee seized the sweeper again and trundled it toward the hall closet where it belonged. "Sure, I'm busy; but it isn't my duty to do this. No; it's Lesura Watkins' job. Have you met up with Lesura, Father? She'll hand you an awful

laugh. She's the champion warranted-not-to-laugh girl from Bellows Falls, Vermont. Get that, Father?"

"Yes, Lee, my boy, yes." And he dropped into an armchair by the table and thought deeply. Why had Vera not come to him. At least she owed him an explanation of last night. Blindly, without question, he had saved her, averted what might have been a tragedy, perhaps, and yet she had given no sign. Bruce had gone to the servant's quarters, after their abrupt meeting on that very spot the night before, and his friend had not seen him again. He, himself, had waited in the library perplexed and worried. Vera, he presumed, had taken the opportunity to steal upstairs to her room. Slowly he shook his head as he pondered. No, it was beyond him—he could not see the end—he——

"Listen, Father," Lee broke into his meditations. "What's up?"

The priest raised his head quickly. While he felt that at all hazards the least suspicion of trouble in this household must be kept from the servants, still he could not bear the suspense that was hanging over him.

"What are you talking about, lad?" He asked the question as lightly as he could, but was conscious of a tremor of nervousness in his voice.

Lee nodded his head slowly. "I mean you and the rest in this house."

Father Kelly shook his broad shoulders impatiently. He was used to a human crisis. In his long term of service, as guardian of the souls of many thousands, there was hardly a problem of

Life he had not been called upon to face. He was not afraid—the tension of his nerves was caused by the oppressive silence, by the fact that he had nothing to proceed upon, no definite line of action.

“Where’s Mr. Wilton?” he asked.

“Gone for a walk. Isn’t that a hit, Father? Gone for a walk on a day like this.” He came a step nearer the Father and lowered his voice. “Didn’t have any breakfast. No; just a big drink of whiskey and out.” His expressive gesture completed the picture of Bruce’s hopeless departure from his home.

The sensitive lips of the priest quivered, and he put his hand over his eyes for a moment. Familiarity with human suffering had not robbed Father Kelly of one atom of that divine sympathy and pity, which are the bedrock foundations of his noble order.

And this was Bruce, his own dear lad, whose mind he had trained, whose capacity for suffering he knew. Then he gripped himself sharply. God would show him the way. He waited a moment, until he felt the calm that comes when the soul leans upon Divinity for guidance.

“And Miss Vera?” he inquired huskily.

“Up in her room—crying.” Lee turned away and surreptitiously drew his sleeve across his eyes.

The priest came to his feet on the instant and took a step toward the stairway. But in the very act he paused. Vera had not come to him. What right had he to force her confidence. He shook his head sadly as he said aloud:

"No, I must think this out—I——" He turned and met Lee's intent gaze fixed on him. With the impulse of the moment he spoke sharply: "Don't stand staring at me like that. How do you know Miss Vera is in her room crying?"

The boy's face flushed and he backed away from his friend. "Gee, Father," he stammered; "what are you jumping hurdles about?"

The startled look in his eyes brought back the priest's control on the instant. He smiled a little wanly and held out his hand as he said:

"I beg your pardon, my lad; I had no right to speak to you like that. Will you forgive me?"

Lee took the proffered hand and shook it warmly. "It's all right, Father!"

"And how do you know Miss Vera——"

"Went up to knock on her door, you know. I thought maybe she was sick or something, and I—I—heard her sobbing. Then I didn't knock, I—I—just came away."

"Poor girl," murmured Father Kelly softly; "and Mr. Wilton gone out walking?"

"Yes, and an awful face on him." Lee moved nearer his friend and dropped his voice. "He was in the library when I came downstairs, a decanter of brandy on the table."

"What evil influence is in this house?" It was almost with a cry of agony that the priest uttered the words. They were wrung from him. He felt himself in the midst of suffering, and the way to comfort, to heal, was not plain to his mind.

Lee stared at him. His astonishment took the form of a question: "Is there an evil influence here?"

Father Kelly nodded. His head was sunk on his chest, and every faculty of his wonderful mind was bent upon the problem he felt was before him. "Yes, lad, yes there is." His voice was low and musical, but in the deep tones one could read tenacity, firmness, the fibre of one who would never give up.

"I felt it last night," he went on, softly. "I almost had my hand on it, and then it was gone." He drew a deep breath and his eyes widened. "Just as it has now." There was a quiver of intense longing as he added: "And Bruce, poor lad, alone in that room all night with black doubts gnawing at his heart."

They were both silent for a moment; then the priest, in his quick pacing of the study came to the drawn curtains of the window. He paused and looked a query at his friend.

Lee shook his head. "I don't know exactly what it's for," he said. "Only don't touch the curtains. Miss Vera's present to Mr. Wilton is there behind them."

"Her present to Mr. Wilton, Lee?"

"Sure! Today's the anniversary of their marriage."

"So it is. I had forgotten. May the day end better than it has begun."

Lee shook his head despondently. "What's the matter, anyhow? Why, everybody was happy enough yesterday."

"I know that, my boy." Father Kelly leaned upon the broad table, and spoke earnestly. "I said to myself, as I sat there in the library. Says I: 'If ever there was a household of peace, good

will and happiness, 'tis here,' and then my eye fell upon the ancient book I held, and I read these words: 'The evil thoughts of one mind, one human brain, can kill the happiness of an entire household; *for thoughts are things.*'"

His voice died away in a whisper. The air in the room seemed to grow heavier, as though it held a portent of something impending.

Lee drew his breath sharply. "Gee! Father Kelly. You make me feel as though there was someone behind me with a brick."

Through the archway came Lesura, carrying with her an atmosphere of utter calm.

"Say!" Her voice came from directly behind Lee, and he turned with a sharp exclamation.

He saw who had startled him, and a frown of disgust, at his own lack of nervous repose, showed upon his face.

"Listen, Miss Watkins; if you want to see Bellows Falls again alive, don't ever do that to me again!"

Lesura looked at him with unwinking serenity. Nothing this strange mortal could do would ever surprise her now. "Do what, Mr. Martin?"

"Don't ever sneak up behind me and murmur in my left ear. I thought for a minute I was sent for."

The girl looked him over carefully. She had learned the futility of asking an explanation of his strange words to her, so she changed the subject at a feminine tangent.

"Do you think Miss Vera knows that her sister has gone?"

Ignorant of the fact that Alice had been in the house, for Lesura always obeyed instructions to the letter, Lee could only ask stupidly:

"Has she?"

Lesura nodded. Then she turned to Father Kelly, who asked in an astonished tone:

"Miss Vera's sister; was she here?"

The girl nodded, a little embarrassed. She was conscious of the priest's high office and felt that she should reply, but how to address him was an intricate problem. She solved it by a deep courtesy and a compromise.

"Yes, Mr.—Mr. Reverend!"

With a withering look, Lee started to correct her, but Father Kelly motioned him away and called Lesura to him.

"Where did Miss Vera's sister go, my girl?" he asked.

"I don't know, sir. Mr.—Mr.——" She was searching vainly for a proper form of address when the priest interrupted her.

"More mysteries," he said. Then, as it had always been his custom when there seemed no answer to a question, he eased his mind of the burden. With a gesture of release he threw all worry away from him. He was done with it, this ceaseless pulling at his brain centers. He wanted rest—to change the subject.

"For the love of Heaven," he cried, "don't you two stand there staring! Can't you smile; can't you laugh?"

His question touched a sore spot in Lee's mind. To be linked with Lesura in his appreciation of humor! This was too much. He pointed to her now and shook his head, gloomily.

"She can't laugh, Father?"

"I can, when there's anything funny to laugh at." She resented this obvious slur.

Father Kelly wagged his head shrewdly. "Well, then, here's our chance to try, for Skeeter's the boy who can make us laugh." Half unconsciously he gave him his old nickname. "Come now, lad, tell us a joke that'll put us all in good humor."

He turned to Lee with a broad smile of anticipation, but the boy shook his head soberly.

"I can't, Father."

"And why not, my boy?"

"Because I've lost a friend."

"That's sad news, my boy."

"You bet it is, Father Kelly. Poor Sam." He heaved a deep sigh. "Poor old Sam. You were my pal, but now you're gone—canned."

His emotion was so nicely simulated that Father Kelly fell into the trap and asked the fatal question.

"Sam who?"

Lee turned upon him with a smile. "Why, Sam-on—salmon."

There was a moment's pause, then the priest fairly shouted with laughter.

"That's fine, Skeeter," he gasped, when he could recover his breath. "Fine, and, sure, I brought it on myself. They canned my friend Sam. Sam who? Why, Sam-on." He went off into a gale of laughter and dropped weakly into a chair by the table and shook with merriment. Then he grasped Lee's hand and shook it energetically.

"I thank you, dear boy; there's no medicine like a good laugh."

But Lee gently pulled him around and pointed to Lesura. "There's one patient it doesn't work on, Father."

The girl stood looking at them with absolutely no expression on her face, except, perhaps, one of mild astonishment.

Father Kelly rose from his chair and went closer to her. "Why don't you laugh, my girl?"

Lesura shook her head and shifted her weight from one foot to the other, uneasily. "Because I don't see anything funny in that." She paused and seemed to be digesting the general idea of the joke. Then she looked up and declared her opinion: "I think it's sad."

"Yes, but look here. You see, he said——"

"If my friend Sam was put in a can," she broke in, "I couldn't laugh. It's awful cruel to put anyone in a tin can. I think that's murder!"

"Hold on; you don't understand!" cried Father Kelly. But Lesura made him a queer little courtesy, which conveyed the idea that she stooped to pick up something from the floor, but changed her mind, and went out through the arch. Father Kelly turned to Lee, who pawed at the air weakly for support, and then leaned on the table. They stood gazing at each other for a long moment, and then the priest inquired:

"What on earth ails the girl?"

Lee shook his head, somberly. "Her face is frozen and you can't break the ice; and I know, Father, because I've tried. Why, Mr. Wilton offered me a prize if I'd make her laugh."

Mr. Wilton—there it was again. The old, haunting feeling of disaster came back to Father Kelly; the pang at his heart when he thought of the man out under this cold, pitiless, leaden sky, fighting the twin devils of doubt and jealousy.

But he put the feeling resolutely away. No, no, no; he would not think of that now. He would wait, wait, until the man or the woman was ready to come to him—to tell him something tangible. Nothing could be done until this fog of mystery was cleared away.

"Never mind," he cried. "Only don't you get gloomy, too. Come away with care; away with it. I want to see merry faces about me."

A sudden inspiration came to him. He struck his hands together excitedly. "Aha, I have it! Where's Charley and my Kathleen. No black looks of woe there, I'll be bound; they're gay and smiling, their voices ringing with happiness—and——"

"Good morning." It was a voice of gloom and despair close behind him. Father Kelly turned quickly and faced—not the debonnaire youth of the evening before, but a Charley Harrow whose face was drawn into a frown. He looked at him a moment unable to believe his own eyes.

"Good morning," said Charley again, gruffly, and shoving his hands deep into his pockets, slouched over to the window, where he studied the barren landscape.

Father Kelly conferred with Lee in a whisper.

"What ails him, do you think?"

"He's got 'em, Father!"

"Got what?"

"All there is to get, and then some more also."

"You reason like a hedgehog, Lee. I think he's having fun with us."

"Having fun with that face, Father?"

"Of course, the face is part of the game. Do you mind now, I'll have him out of it." He cleared his throat loudly. "Look you here, Charles Harrow—I——"

He stopped abruptly, for Kathleen came in from the library. Her arms were piled high with books of various sizes, and there was upon her face a look of grim determination. Behind her, as a body guard, marched Lesura Watkins, loaded with still another assortment of volumes.

"Lee," whispered Father Kelly, "something has happened, or is going to happen," he added, for he saw Charley turn at the window, in evident trepidation, and edge his way to the piano.

Kathleen placed the books she carried upon the table and Lesura followed her action exactly. Father Kelly, with an elaborate air of unconcern, strolled over to Kathleen, who, planted behind the table, was arranging her literary battery with some evident purpose.

Wondering what it could all mean, Lee craned his head forward curiously, when he felt a light touch on his arm. Lesura stood behind him and, as he turned to her, she gravely handed him a cane. He took it from her hand, looked at it, and inquired: "Yes; but what's the idea of handing me this dress up stick?"

She nodded soberly. "Why, you said I ought to get the hook!"

"Yes, I did, and really, I think so now more than ever."

"I hope it's the right one, Mr. Martin." She took it from him and looked at the handle, which had a most obvious crook. "This is the only hook I haven't got for you."

She handed it back to him and paused. "What are you laughing at, Mr. Martin?"

Lee took the cane, not by the handle, but at the end close to the ferrule. He gazed at the hook in the handle, then at Lesura. "I'm laughing at my joke about Sam. Say, couldn't you manage just a gentle snicker, or a ladylike tee-hee, what?"

"No," she answered, soberly; "because it isn't funny."

He looked down again at the hooked handle of the cane and urged her gently with his elbow. "It isn't, eh? Well, you try it on someone and see. Try it now."

Lesura took a step forward and yielded to the suggestion.

"My friend Sam was put in a can," she said, loudly and monotonously.

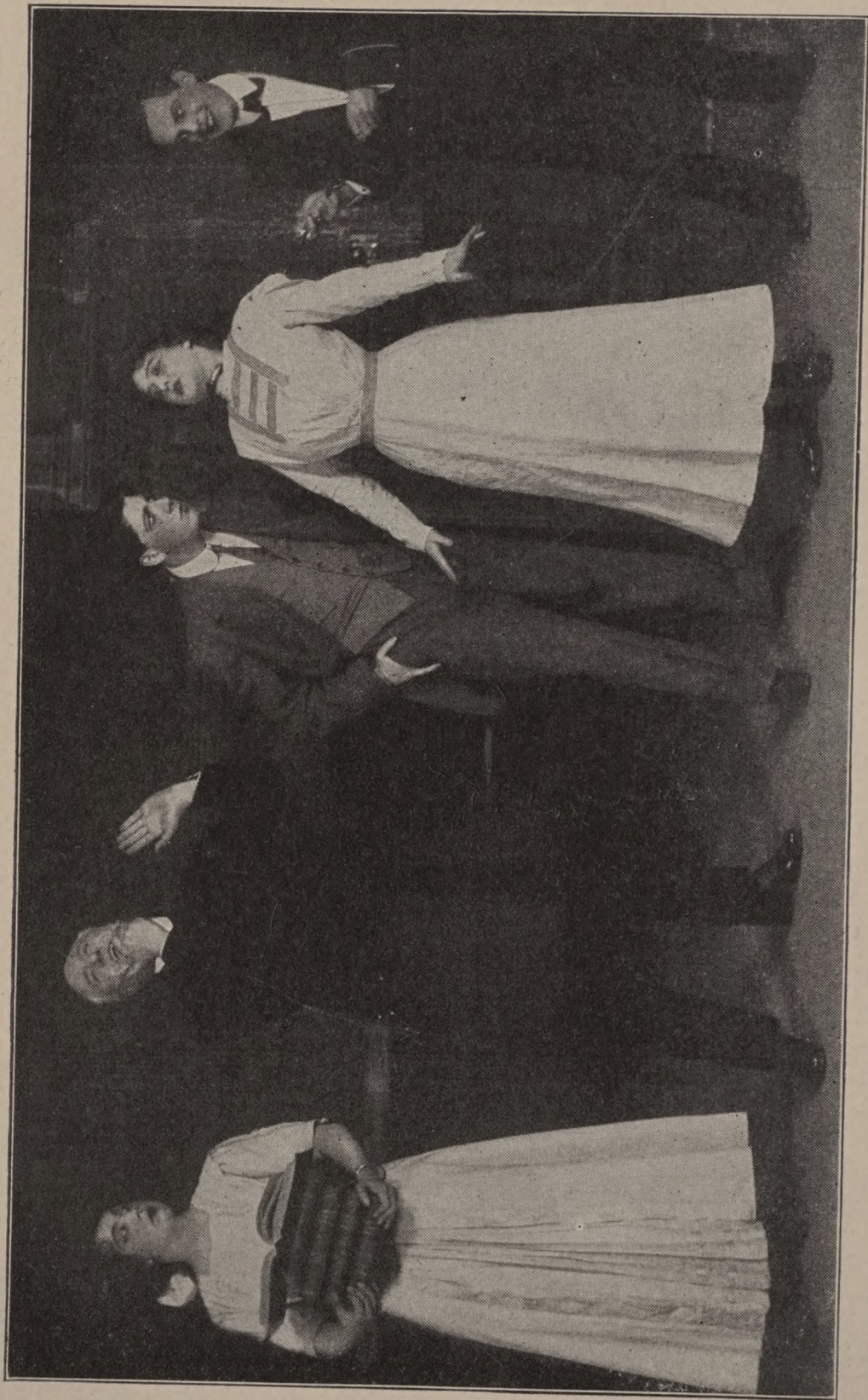
Father Kelly and Charley turned to her, surprised.

"What in the world——" began Father Kelly, but stopped as Lee signaled him vigorously over Lesura's head.

"Yes," said Lesura again, in a high sing song voice. "Yes, they put Sam in a can."

"Sam who?" asked Charley, impatiently?

There was a pause. Lesura frowned; she was a little unprepared for this. Then her brow



"The hook"

cleared; of course she knew what to say; it was one word—a fish. Yes, she knew. She spoke it triumphantly:

“Codfish!”

“Ah,” cried Lee, “you do get the hook,” and encircling her neck with the cane’s handle, he dragged Lesura protesting through the arch and down the hall.

Father Kelly’s laughter was Homeric. He went to the arch and called after them: “The hook!”

Kathleen rapped sharply on the table. “Hush, please, Uncle!”

He turned and examined her closely. Lines of determination were visible on her comely face. Little by little he became solicitous for her welfare. “What’s ailing you, Katy?” he asked.

“Just this, Uncle Brian.” She rested one hand on the table and he noticed about her a vague air of command. “You know, Mr. Harrow has asked me to marry him?”

“Though I didn’t hear him, Katy, still I’ll take your word for it.” He turned and smiled at Charley, waggishly.

“She hasn’t said yes, yet,” returned Charley, mournfully.

Father Kelly gave him a friendly dig with his elbow.

“Mr. Harrow,” broke in Kathleen, sharply, “who was Brian Boru?”

“What’s that?” ejaculated Father Kelly.

“Brian Boru?” repeated young Harrow, feebly.

“Yes, Mr. Harrow; who was Brian Boru?”

Father Kelly put up his hand in protest.

"Wait, please, one moment. Now list to me, Katy; what is all this?"

Kathleen looked up sternly from the large book she held open before her. "Uncle Brian, you know I have always said I would only marry an Irishman."

A great light dawned upon the priest. He pursed up his lips into a silent whistle and put his hand on the young man's shoulders.

"Have you no Irish blood in you, Charles Harrow? Sure and that's a name from the old dart."

"Of course, Father; I'm half Irish."

Father Kelly turned triumphantly to Kathleen. "Didn't you hear him, Katy?"

"Yes, he said the same thing to me not half an hour ago, in the library, and now"—she struck the open volume in her hand—"I'm going to find out. If he's Irish, he knows the history of his native land."

"Of course," agreed her uncle. "So fire away, and I'll see fair play. Hold up your head, Charles Harrow, and remember the greatest trait of the Irishman is—he's a fighter who never knows that he's beaten. Hurroo!" The burr of his own dear Irish hills and vales was in the music of his tone. "Hurroo!" he repeated, and looked significantly at young Harrow.

"Hurrah!" echoed Charley, feebly.

"Not like that," reproached Father Kelly, frowning. "You hurrah in New Jersey; or in Maine, or in that small and deluded state of Rhode Island, but in Ireland you—Hurroo!"

Charley nodded blankly and settled his chin

into his collar nervously. "I—I'm ready for the test, Kath—— Miss O'Connor!"

Kathleen eyed him sternly. "Who was Brian Boru?"

"Why—he—he was—he was——"

"Take your time, Charles Harrow," urged Father Kelly; "take your——"

"Do you know?" asked Kathleen, with some asperity.

The young man's face cleared and he smiled. Did he know? He would show them. "Yes," he replied, "Brian Boru played third base on the Pittsburg nine. His batting average was 320. He's a great base runner—he——"

Father Kelly, who had listened horrified to this Celtic desecration, threw up his hands with a gesture of suffocation. "Stop it! stop it!" he gasped. "Man alive, you're ruining the Irish Nation; you're filling up the Irish sea and trying to annex the dear old Emerald Isle to the boss ridden state of Pennsylvania."

"Wasn't I right?" asked Charley, feebly.

"No, you were wrong," cried Father Kelly, accusingly; "so wrong that if I didn't love you I'd—I'd——. Brian Boru a ball player! I wonder the Heavens don't fall down on you!"

"Well, who was Brian Boru?"

"One of the great Kings of Old Ireland," said Kathleen, proudly, and she closed the book as though the matter were ended and his fate sealed.

"Help!" said young Harrow, and he dropped into a chair.

Father Kelly interceded for him. "Well, sure, Katy dear, give the lad another chance. Ah, do. See now, he may be weak on history."

After a pause, Kathleen nodded and began a search among the books upon the table.

"If you love me," whispered her uncle to the apprehensive young man in the chair, "if you love me, don't hand me another jolt like that!"

"Are you ready, Mr. Harrow?" Kathleen had opened a hostile looking book of large proportions, bound in suggestive green.

Charley, obeying Father Kelly's nod, got to his feet. "I—I guess so! Ye—yes!"

"Now, then, take your time, lad; take your time!" But though he spoke with a brave tone, Father Kelly's confidence in young Harrow was evidently a good deal shaken.

An ominous pause succeeded. Kathleen was turning the leaves of the formidable tome she held with nerve racking slowness.

"Looking for a bombshell," whispered her uncle. Then his face cleared as he heard Kathleen's second question.

"Mr. Harrow, where did the Fenians come from?"

Good Father Kelly locked his hands behind his back and rocked himself on his heels and toes comfortably. "Sure, 'tis all over but the hurroos, Charley," he smiled. "That question! Why, not to answer it would disgrace any Celt. We drew it in with our first breaths of lowland fog and peat smoke. Come on now, *Harrow Aboo!*"

"Why—they—the, the Fenians——" faltered Charley.

"Go right after them, my lad," cried his friend, smiling.

"The Fenians came from Buffalo, New York!"

Father Kelly choked suddenly; the smile of encouragement, of confidence, left his face, and he spread his arms wide as though groping for support.

"You see, Uncle Brian, it's impossible; he's not Irish, he, he—oh——" and Kathleen dropped the book upon the table with a crash, and with the dignity of one of its heroes, swept majestically to the door.

"Kathleen!" cried young Harrow, following her in the depths of despair, "Kathleen, just one word!"

She gave it to him on the threshold, one slender hand holding back the curtain, her blue eyes flashing with the fire of her ancestors, who fought the Danes back into the sea; who opposed Cromwell; whose names are written large in the heroic history of the world.

It was one, single word, as he asked.

"Good bye!"

Charley took it like a man, head up and shoulders squared. He turned with a sheepish look and met Father Kelly's stare of reproach and horror.

"Oh, you villain!" said his friend. "Upon my word, if it wasn't for the cloth I wear, I—I——"

Charley interrupted him, plaintively. "Didn't the Fenians come from Buffalo?"

Father Kelly gasped for breath. Then he drew himself to his full height and his eyes glowed. Through him spoke the Church Militant, built by the work of centuries, each block in its sacred pile a great, unselfish, sacrificing soul; the marvelous edifice cemented by the blood of its Martyred

Saints poured out like water for the glory of the Divine Being, and the good of sinning, struggling, ever advancing mankind.

"List to me, boy! The Feni of Erin were the Irish militia of the third century. Their commander was Finn, son of Cumhall, the father of Oisim. They were giants in stature, renowned in arms and feats of strength; the glory and honor of the Old Sod lay in their hands; if they lived today, Old Ireland would be Free, Free!" He paused for a moment, and then added, sorrowfully: "And you stand there and say they came from Buffalo. Oh! I could weep for shame of you!"

But historical blunders were not just then occupying Charley's attention. His mind was focused on the girl he loved, who had just swept from the room.

"What can I do to win Kathleen?" he asked. timorously.

Father Kelly turned and surveyed him a moment, not unkindly. At all events, the lad did not give up. It was a trait he understood and honored. He turned quickly to the table and caught up an armful of the books there.

"You might make a beginning here, Charley Harrow. Take these, and these, and this heavy one." He piled them high on the young fellow's arm and pushed him gently toward the library. "Learn all there is in those books about Ireland, then come back and reel it off to her."

"I'll do it, Father!" cried Charley, warming up with the prospect of even a fighting chance. "Yes, and I'll go you one better! No, don't ask

me what it is, but I'll do it. I love Kathleen, Father; no matter what I am, I love her, and I'll win her; you'll see!"

He strode from the study with the light of a great purpose in his eye. Father Kelly looked after him and nodded wisely.

"Well!" he said, smiling up at the ceiling thoughtfully. "Sure the boy has the first qualification to be an Irishman. He knows what he wants, and, faith, he'll fight until he gets it."

Then he paused and his face grew very grave and earnest, for he heard a soft footfall coming nearer.

Vera was descending the stairs.

CHAPTER XV

THE CRISIS IN EDEN

THERE was a little suggestion of faltering about Vera, as she came into the study. Her aching nerves and throbbing pulses could bear the suspense of her own room no longer. Anything was better than this state of doubt, of mental turmoil, she told herself. The door to the stairway opened into the study, so at first she did not see Father Kelly.

He was glad of that.

From the corner of the broad window embrasure, whither he had withdrawn at the first hint of her coming, he stole a look at her over the top of the book he had taken from a low case.

She was very pale, and the worried, harried, hunted look in her brown eyes gripped all the sympathy of his great human soul. Once in the Adirondacks he had seen a doe with that same look of anguish in her eyes turn upon the men who hunted her.

Father Kelly had interposed then and the wild creature had gone free. Somehow the same scene came back to him now. The great trees, the little brook, the towering mountains, the little lake just beyond the rocks, and the cruel face of the man who hunted——

"Why, Father Kelly!" She had seen him and he noticed, with a little pang of sorrow, that her first impulse had been to retreat up the stairs.



"Don't," he said, very softly

He closed the book and smiled reassuringly at her, trying to put into his gaze all the friendship he felt for this young wife, who stepped so near to tragedy.

"Good morning, acushla machree!" The old Celtic greeting was like a caress from his lips.

She closed her eyes for a moment, and her sweet face quivered; then she made a brave effort.

"Doesn't that sound charming—those old Irish words?" Her laugh was a little sharp and shrill to his quick ear.

"I mean them!"

"After my not coming down until this hour, leaving you all alone." She laughed again and her eyes did not meet his clear gaze. "You're very forgiving, Father Kelly."

The priest laid the book upon the table and leaned over it.

"Don't," he said, very softly.

"Don't what?" Her hand sought the support of a high backed chair; her fingers unconsciously followed the lines of its carving.

Father Kelly came quite close to Vera and his voice was very low and earnest. "Don't treat me like one of your society friends!"

Vera tried to laugh. "What are you talking about, Father Kelly?"

The priest's voice was tense with conviction. "This: you'll need a real friend before this day is over."

As though his words touched an aching spot, she swept by him, over to the window, threw it open and breathed the heavy, moist air. The lace

upon her breast rose and fell quickly and she pressed one hand there.

"I must speak," said Father Kelly, shaking his head slowly. "I am a guest under your roof, but before and above all conventions, I am your loyal friend and your husband's!"

He paused for a moment, but the only sign she gave was a backward movement of her head as though she were steadying herself.

"Treat me like your friend, Vera." His voice rang with such deep affection that she turned and looked at him.

"What do you mean, Father?"

"Tell me about last night."

She gave a quick gasp, almost as though his words had chilled her.

"Tell me all," he persisted.

"I cant! I can't!" and she started almost wildly toward the stairway.

Father Kelly stopped her with a single sentence as he leaned over the table.

"Do you love Bruce?"

Her hand paused on the knob and she leaned her face upon the edge of the half opened door.

"Do you love Bruce; do you love your home?" His words cut through her consciousness like a rapier blade.

"Yes, yes, with all my heart, soul, strength!" She stood erect, her back to the heavy oaken door, her eyes dilated, every faculty in her woman's heart alive and quivering.

The priest did not move towards her, but his wonderful eyes looked a very heaven of compassion.

"A great danger threatens Bruce, you, this home; your very life and happiness."

Her hands went up to her throat in a despairing gesture. "Don't; please, please, don't! I've—I've been awake all night. I couldn't sleep. Something seems to be hanging over me—over Bruce——" Her voice ended in a sob of pain. She threw out her hands with the gesture of one who feels the turgid, bitter waters of sorrow overwhelming, stifling—— "Help me, Father; help——me——"

His hands flew out to her, and so for a moment she clung to their sturdy, comforting clasp. Then the blessed relief of tears came.

Father Kelly put her in a broad chair and drew another close by her side. He did not try to check the tears. Rather he was glad to see them; anything was better than her stony, dry eyed misery, for Nature will have an outlet to sorrow, else her Life force turns and rends the physical body and mind.

"Mavourneen," he said, very gently, when the first passion of her grief was over. "I'd lay down my life for you, or Bruce, but"—and his voice grew grave—"you must tell me all."

"You won't repeat, Father——"

He smiled down at her kindly. "Vera, child, remember my office. All my life, grief stricken, sin laden human beings have been coming to me, for the peace that comes from confession and forgiveness there. Tell me!"

She shook her head slowly. "Father, I know no more than you do about last night!"

The priest looked at her keenly. No, her eyes

looked into his with truth and candor in them. He shook his head. There was again the feeling of something intangible, something just beyond his mental reach. Slowly he paced the heavy carpet of the study and turned, looking at Vera thoughtfully.

"May I ask you a few questions?"

She nodded and her eyes followed him gratefully. Already he had brought an inward peace to her. The problem looming so black and menacing when she faced it alone, did not seem an impossible one now that his mind was grappling with it. Yes, she knew that Father Kelly would solve it.

Through the half hazy mist of her quieted mind his mellow voice came to her in a question.

"Why did you come down to this room, after we had said good night?"

"I was worried, Father; I couldn't sleep. I thought perhaps it was because Alice, my sister, had been feeling poorly. I went to her room and she wasn't there. Then I thought I heard her moan. It seemed to come from the study, so I came down the stairs."

"You had no light?"

"No, I felt my way."

"Well, you came down those stairs." He went over to the door and opened it, looking about the room.

"Yes, Father."

"Was your sister in this room when you opened that door, Vera?"

She nodded.

"Will you show me about where?"

Vera rose to her feet. "Why, here, I think—yes, here. It was so dark I couldn't see distinctly at first; then I caught a shimmer of the gray dress Alice wore——"

Father Kelly left the door and went quickly to the spot Vera had indicated. He noted that it was midway between the two French windows. Then, as a sudden thought flashed through his mind, he asked another more significant question.

"Was your sister alone here?"

Vera hesitated. "I don't know. It was very dark. I couldn't see at all plainly."

"Please don't keep anything back from me, Vera."

She turned to him, inquiringly. "Did you see anyone?"

The priest was reflecting deeply. Vera came a step nearer. "You saw my sister here, Father?"

He shook his head. "No; I came through those curtains from the library when the piano keys sounded——Who——?" He looked at her, inquiringly.

"I did that, in the dark; I was confused, frightened."

Father Kelly nodded comprehendingly. "You can't see this spot in the room from the angle of those curtains," he said, crossing the study to verify his words.

Something in his look or manner hurt her. She tried to throw off the feeling, and then yielded to the subtle fear that had pursued her all the long night.

"Father Kelly, do you believe I came down to this room for any other purpose than to find my sister?"

He looked at her thoughtfully before he answered. "I'm afraid that is what your husband is thinking, Vera."

Though the words were gentle, the implication stung her. "Do you believe that; do you, do you?"

She came towards him almost wildly, her hands outstretched, her voice quivering. The priest caught them in his own to steady her as he answered: "I wish I were as sure of Heaven, my girl, as I am of your truth and purity!"

"Thank you, Father," she said, brokenly; "thank you."

He put the matter in a new light, as she turned away from him. "But don't you see, Vera, I'm not the one to be convinced."

"You mean Bruce?" she asked, leaning heavily upon the piano and staring at him.

He nodded briefly. "Yes. You know him; rash, impetuous, headlong, emotional; heart all right, but liable to be swerved from the right path by sudden impulse." He paused, hesitated a moment, and then added, softly: "Jealous, too."

Vera nodded and the tears came to her eyes. She was thinking of yesterday, in the arbor, and her words to Bruce: "Sometimes I'm afraid I may do something." Her eyes closed as she thought of his caress that had driven away her forebodings; the memory was an exquisite pain now.

Father Kelly broke in on her reverie, almost sharply. "Your sister has gone, they tell me. Do you know where she is?"

Vera shook her head.

"She went away——"

"When I found her here in the study, I—I tried to detain her, to talk to her; but she broke away from me and darted out through that window——" She stopped abruptly, for a strange look came over her friend's face. "What is it, Father?" she asked, in a whisper.

The priest passed his hand slowly over his eyes. "There it is again," he said, in such a low, hushed tone that she hardly heard him.

"What, Father?"

"Sure, I don't know!" He closed his eyes as if to shut out all visual impressions, and spoke softly, as though to study carefully his own feeling. "A strange sensation of evil came over me just then, as though the very embodiment of Satan stood behind me."

Vera shivered slightly. "Don't, please, Father. She rose from the chair into which she had dropped, with a little gesture of warding off something.

"I'm only telling you," he soothed her. "'Tis only my fancy, maybe."

"What can I do, Father?" she asked, after a pause.

"Wait," he answered, briefly. "Do nothing when you're in doubt—wait, think"—his voice dropped—"pray—the answer will come; the way will always open."

There was silence between them for a time. Vera closed her eyes. She did pray; not in words, for none came to her. It was the higher supplication of the spirit that she offered; the yearning call of the human soul, that, through all

the ages since time began, has been answered, always. A great peace stole over her, and she felt the flow of new life and hope surge through her. She looked at Father Kelly, and a question rose to her lips.

"Bruce; where is he?"

"Gone for a walk, Lee said. Have you seen him since last night, Vera?"

She shook her head dumbly, the old, cruel pain stabbing at her again.

A step sounded outside the window. Vera turned with a quick look at her friend, and he nodded.

"It may be Bruce," he said. "I hope it is, for then——"

Kenward Wright came in through the window, and smiled genially.

"Good morning, Vera, Father Kelly," he said.

Vera nodded and turned away to hide the tears of disappointment that would come.

"Back so soon, Mr. Wright?" asked the priest.

Kenward nodded. "Yes; finished up the business that took me away. Stupid to call me into town; wanted my opinion on some property on Long Island. You know, I'm supposed to be an expert on real estate there——" He stopped abruptly, and looked at them both keenly. "I say, anything the matter? Vera, you're looking pale and drawn!"

She nodded dumbly. "I've had a bad night, Ken."

"Sorry for that." He threw his rain coat over his arm and went towards the hallway arch. "Cheer up, Vera; the sun will be out in a few

hours, and we'll all feel better. I'll run up to my room." He paused and turned to them. "Oh, I say, what's the matter with Bruce?"

Vera stopped abruptly on her way to the west window. Her hand grasped the corner of the piano and she looked tremulously at Father Kelly; she could not trust herself to speak.

"Have you seen Bruce this morning, Mr. Wright?" asked the priest.

Kenward nodded. "As I drove up from the station. He was ploughing through the mud and mist with his head down, and a look on his face that gave me a shock." He looked at them for a moment and then asked: "Nothing the—matter, is there?"

Vera shook her head.

"I'm glad of that. Mind if I have the cook get me a cup of coffee; I was hurried this morning. Thanks." He drew the curtain on the arch aside and looked at her curiously as he inquired: "Why didn't you let me know your sister Alice was here last night, Vera?"

"How did you know she was here, Ken?"

"The station master told me this morning; said she caught the next train after the one I took. Why did she go in town at that time of night?"

Vera shook her head. "I don't know, Ken."

"Nor where she went?"

"No."

"Haven't you heard from her today?"

"No. Go and get your coffee, Ken."

"Yes," he said, slowly; "but it's very odd. If I can be of any use, let me know."

Vera nodded to him as he left the study. Then

she turned to Father Kelly and put her hand to her head confusedly. "Alice went in town—in the storm—at that hour—why——"

The priest cut her short; his mind had been busy with another phase of their problem.

"You see where you stand," he said. "Your husband is out tramping the countryside, fighting his doubts of you and the only person who can prove to him that you came down to this room last night for the reason you name, is—your sister!"

"I know, I know!" Vera cried, despairingly, and then she paused before the drawn curtains at the other end of the room. "Bruce," she whispered; "Bruce, you doubt, doubt me—and on the anniversary of the day I gave myself to you. Why, Father," she turned swiftly to the priest; "my present for Bruce is here behind these curtains."

Father Kelly waved her words aside. Nothing should turn him from the matter in hand.

"We must find your sister," he decided.

Vera struck her hands together impatiently as she answered. "How? how? how?"

"I don't know, but there must be some way!"

"Why did Alice go away like that!" she cried, pacing restlessly up and down. "Find the reason!"

"Find the man!" The words fell from Father Kelly's lips sharply. He had found a fulcrum for the lever of his thought.

"Father!" She had turned at the table and was staring at him.

He shook his head impatiently. "This is no time to mince matters, Vera."

"Find the man," she repeated, slowly; the words were an echo of her own thoughts that she had put away from her—tried to drive from her mind.

"Find the—man," she said again, slowly, and laid her hand upon his arm, tremulously. "Father!" Her voice had a note of awe in it. "Can you look into another's mind?"

The deep resonance of his voice filled the study. "To save you and Bruce, whom I love as though you were my own, I believe God would give me that power."

She moved a little away; a power beyond that of earth and its mortal life seemed to envelop him.

"You have thought that, too, Vera," he said, simply, after a pause.

She bowed her head and a quick flush swept over her cheek and brow. She half turned away to hide it. "Oh!" she murmured, "it can't be! Alice, my sister——"

"Is there any other possible reason for your sister's action, Vera? We must face the facts. She came down here last night—left her room and stole down those stairs. A man was here in the study——"

Vera interrupted sharply: "You saw him, Father?"

The priest shook his head. "I saw a dim shadow glide out of that window."

She nodded, her eyes wide with wonder. "I thought I saw it, too!"

"This morning," he went on, "I rose early. I went out into the grounds. There was no one

stirring in the house. Vera, there were impressions in the soft earth at that window. They were half obliterated by the rain, but they were there. Someone had stolen softly on tiptoe to that window; the same person had left this room in haste." He paused a moment that she might grasp this thoroughly. Then he went on. "Yes, a man was in this room last night with your sister. Who was he?"

"I don't know, Father."

He took both her hands in his and spoke earnestly. "Think, acushla; it's your life's happiness that's at stake. Yes, and Bruce's. Think!"

She looked up into his face and the tears rushed to her eyes at the sympathy, the loyal friendship in his voice.

Then she shook her head dumbly. "I don't know," she faltered.

Father Kelly sighed. "Let us both think, Vera," he said. "'Tis a hard problem, but—*the way will open!*"

She drew a deep breath at the firm conviction of his tone; this man had the faith that removes mountains.

The clock checked off the moments from the mantel; a vagrant wind stirred the curtains at the window.

Then the telephone upon the table rang sharply.



"It is a message from Bellevue Hospital

CHAPTER XVI

THE THROB OF TRAGEDY

THE sharp, vibrant note of the 'phone bell set every nerve in Vera to jangling. She looked at the priest, and his calm face steadied her.

Again the 'phone bell sounded; it seemed to have a more insistent note.

"Answer it, Vera," he said, quietly, and she went to the table and put the receiver to her ear. "Well—— Yes, this is Mr. Wilton's country house—— Yes, this is Mrs. Wilton at the 'phone. What—— Please—please speak louder. Why—I—I——"

The instrument fell from her hand and she reeled as though she had been struck.

"Steady!" cried Father Kelly, springing to her. "Steady; so—now, there, get a grip of yourself, girl!"

She clung to him silently, until the pounding of her pulses ceased; until the dark mist that had, in an instant, covered the room, faded away; then she looked up at him and tried to smile. "Father!"

"Sure and I'm here," he replied, cheerily. "Here, close beside you; feel the grip of my hand? Steady, steady."

Vera looked up at him pitifully. "It's a—a message from Bellevue Hospital, New York City," she panted; then a sob tore from her.

"Take your own time, my girl." His voice held and calmed her.

"It's—it's about—about Alice!" Her voice broke into a husky whisper, and she waited a moment, gaining courage from his level gaze and the grip of his hands on her arm. "Alice—she—she was knocked down by an automobile early this morning in New York City."

"Yes. I hear ye, mavourneen; don't lose hold of yourself again. Steady!"

"They—they found a—a—my card in her purse. She's there, badly hurt, Father!"

"You must go to her," he said instantly, divining what would bring Vera the most comfort.

"I'll take you!"

"You will?" she sobbed.

Father Kelly nodded. "See when the next train leaves," he said; and while she caught up a time table from the desk, he picked up the receiver and put it to his ear.

"Is that Bellevue Hospital?" he asked. "Ah! thank you for holding the line. This is Brian Kelly talking—— What? Oh, you know me, do you? And pray, who are you? What? Is that you, Dennis O'Hara—well! well! well!" He smiled and put his hand over the mouthpiece as he turned to Vera. "Sure, and it's one of my old boys from the Five Point Mission. O'Hara, a wild youngster. Go get your things on."

Vera looked up from her examination of the time table with a sob. "There's no train for an hour, Father!"

"Wait a bit, Danny," he said through the 'phone; then he turned to her again. "Go, Vera, and make yourself ready, anyhow."

She turned toward the stairway, but in the confused tangle of her thoughts, one thread drew her back to him. "If Bruce comes, Father——" she laid her feverish hand on his shoulder and bent close to his ear: "Tell him I love him!"

The priest looked up at her and smiled. "Faith, I'll give him that message, and more beside, child!"

Just a moment she hesitated, and then went hurriedly up the stairs.

"Now, then, Dan," and Father Kelly turned to the 'phone; "talk to me. How badly is the lady hurt? Seriously? That's bad. I'm glad you didn't tell Mrs. Wilton that." He thought a moment and then spoke again, his eyes bright with a new idea. "Listen, now: Could the lady 'phone Mrs. Wilton? No, wait—I mean, could she answer if Mrs. Wilton called her? What? Ah! There's a 'phone in her room, you say—and—and she's conscious? Good. I'm bringing Mrs. Wilton in by the next train, but she may want to speak with her sister meanwhile."

He paused and started to hang up the receiver, but a sudden thought checked him. "Danny," he called; answer me one thing. "Are you a good boy? If I could see you, I wouldn't have to ask the question; but you can't look along the wire—yet." A smile broke over his face as the line vibrated to the reply. "You are? Good! That's fine. I never forget you in my prayers, lad. That's a good lad," he murmured as he hung up the instrument and rose from the chair.

He moved over to the curtains that covered the archway to the hall, for his mind had swung

back again to the mystery of last night. Perhaps there might be some flaw in his reasoning.

As he drew back the curtains and stepped through the arch, trying to reproduce the physical surroundings when he had entered the study from the library, Bruce came in through the French window. He did not see his friend, for his head was bent low, and he seemed intent on some thought.

It struck the priest like a flash that perhaps he, too, had been looking for footprints in the damp earth.

Father Kelly crossed the study slowly. Bruce had thrown his mackintosh over a chair and sunk down by the table in an attitude of helpless misery. His friend stood thoughtfully regarding him a moment, then gently laid his hand upon his shoulder.

Bruce started to his feet quickly. "Good morning, Father Kelly"; but he did not turn and face him.

"Good morning," replied the priest gently, and then added: "You're not going into town, lad?"

"No; my manager Evarts is there."

"But didn't you tell me yesterday that you had business today of more than usual importance?"

"Yes, a big deal; but it's all right. Evarts has his orders; he'll carry it through."

Father Kelly shook his head. "Isn't that tempting Fate, Bruce?"

"No, my plans are too well laid; they've been kept too secret." He pushed the whole matter away from him with impatient gesture. "Don't let's talk of business—business—as though any-

thing could matter when—when——” Again he stopped abruptly, and whirling on his heel skirted the table and moved restlessly over to the piano. Then, with a laugh, he tried to hide his real feelings in conventionalities. “Hope you’ll pardon my dashing off the way I did this morning, Father. Did they give you any breakfast?”

Father Kelly came over to him and stood silent until he forced Bruce to look at him. Wavering, the eyes came up to meet the priest’s, and the misery in them, the pain, the anguish, the horrible doubts smote the Father like a cruel blow.

He waited a moment, fearing to trust his voice; then he said, slowly: “And this is how you treat me after all these years?”

Bruce tore himself away from the accusing eyes. “I’m treating you like a friend.”

The reply came sharp and insistent. “Asking your pardon, Bruce, but you’re not.”

“Why——”

“You come into this room,” Father Kelly went on; “I see you sunk in the depths of black despair. Do you think I don’t know how you feel? Man, dear, I’ve suffered with you all the long night, but when I come to you and put out my hand, you try to throw me off.”

Bruce dropped his head. Yes, that was exactly what he had done; but—— He clenched his hands, and the words were torn from him: “It’s the only safe way!”

“It’s not!” The priest’s contradiction came back like a bullet, without apology or palliation. “It’s the coward’s way, and you’re not that!”

The man writhed under the priest’s words.

Father Kelly knew the nature with which he had to deal. No half way measures would do here. His better self must be aroused to meet this disaster that threatened his home. Doubts must be stated in the broad light; suspicions dragged into the open; jealousy met face to face—for in silence, darkness, they work their mischief in a household.

All the man's efforts were given to avoid discussion. He had thought until his brain reeled.

"There are some things you don't understand," he said, huskily, and turned away.

"Not about you," came the hammerlike tones of his friend; "and I tell you now you must speak out, Bruce. Never fly from trouble. Meet it and give it a crack in its ugly face."

"You're making me remember, Father, what I've walked miles to forget." The tone was pleading now; not harsh, as it had been.

"And you didn't succeed. You brought it back with you, riding on your shoulders and sinking its spur deep in you."

Sharp pain showed in the man's face. He clenched his hands and cried out, huskily: "Don't; you're torturing me!"

"The surgeon tortures, Bruce; *but he cures.*"

"You can't help me, Father."

The priest came nearer, and his voice took a vibrant tone of hope. "God can, Bruce."

The words seemed to fill the study with music. Like a great and solemn anthem they came from the Father's lips. Something like a presence seemed to stir in the air about the two friends.

The man crouched forward in the chair, his

hands, locked over his forehead. He felt the influence, but only for a moment. He dashed his fist down upon his knee and rose to his feet.

"No; He can't help me!" he cried, harshly; "because I'm an unbeliever, an atheist. I know I'm hurting you, Father Kelly; but if you want me to talk, you must bear what I say. I'm——" He stopped abruptly and looked at his friend, for the priest stood silent, his eyes closed, and lines of pain showing in his face. Half regretfully, Bruce took a step toward him. "What are you doing, Father?"

There was a tense silence for a moment; then the priest's voice came to him in a tone of longing: "Praying for you, lad; to the Power that rules the world, and all in it; praying for your soul!"

Then his eyes opened wide and there shone in them the fire of a tremendous will, as he cried, almost fiercely: "Evil shall not have you, lad. It may drag you close to the mouth of the pit, but old Father Kelly will never let you go. He'll follow you and bring you back to love and to—God!"

In the *ecstasy* of his divine purpose, he threw his arm about the man's shoulders, as though already he felt an evil influence dragging at him.

For a moment Bruce hesitated. Then he looked at the window that led out upon the lawn, and the same thought that had pursued him burned its way again through his agonized brain. Roughly he shook off the arm of his friend and walked toward the window. Then he turned, with a harsh laugh. "You say that, after last night, Father Kelly?"

The priest faced him, unwavering. "I'll say it with my last breath, dear lad."

Bruce turned away. "And why not?" He dropped into a chair by the table and leaned his head on his hand. "You're a priest, shut out from the world! You don't know what it is to love with your whole heart and soul—and then—then——" His voice died away as though he feared to put into words the thought in his mind.

A fleeting look of pain came over Father Kelly's face; it seemed as though the words had touched some fountain of memory that had lain sealed for many years.

"You think I don't know," he said, softly, as if memory had taken him by the hand and was leading him up to the doors of some sacred shrine; a holy place, consecrated by renunciation.

"It's nigh forty-five years since a boy and a girl stood by the side of a rippling stream in the old country. She was the fairest of God's creatures; gentleness and purity shone from her eyes; her soul was—white. And the boy, a mere stripling, looked at her and said: 'I love you, mavourneen; but there is something within me that calls me to work for mankind—to give my life to our church.' And those two clasped hands and parted, never to meet again, until the sea shall give up its dead and parting shall be no more." He paused, and his smile was that of one who had tasted the waters of life and knew their bitterness and their joy. His tone had a yearning tenderness as he said: "That girl was your mother, Bruce; the

lad myself. That's why I love you, boy, for the sake of the girl who looks and longs and prays for her boy now—to the God that you deny."

Every fibre of Bruce's being thrilled at the words.

His mother, he could dimly remember her: a gentle, sweet faced woman, with a beauty almost ethereal. Then the long days when a stern faced man, his father, used to bring him to a room where his mother lay and lift him to her arms that held him tight. And then the day when there was a hush about the quaint old house, and people walked upon their tiptoes and talked in low tones. High up in his nursery he had heard the sound of voices singing; even the refrain he could remember: "Lead, kindly light, upon our earthly pathway."

He had dropped his marvelous train of toy cars and clung to his nurse, and begged her to take him to—to—mother. She had hushed him gently and told him that mother had gone away on a long, long journey, but that some day, if he was very, very good, he would see her again. There were tears in her eyes, as she told him this, and he had dried them and tried to comfort her. Then the long years of his youth, to manhood and understanding of his great loss—and—and Father Kelly. He knew now why the priest had worked so hard with him—why his eyes dwelt on him with such deep affection. He wondered if——

Sharp and clear came his friend's voice: "Now, Bruce, grip yourself; we'll fight this out together!"

Like a savage flood all the old torturing doubts rolled back upon him. He started to his feet and threw out his hand desperately. It was the action of a drowning man.

"I can't; I can't!" he gasped. "When I think of last night, I'm in Hell!"

Even for this Father Kelly had a reply. "Many a man, Bruce, has been there and come back safe."

The man shook his head. "No, I can't think; I can't reason it out." His eyes roved wildly about the room, and fastened upon the weak man's refuge, the decanter upon the escritoire. He made two steps towards it.

"What are you doing, lad?" Father Kelly stepped before him with the challenge.

Bruce paused and his voice was husky, as he replied: "I want a drink!" Then his hand closed upon the decanter.

Father Kelly took it from him, not gently, but with decisive force. "You can't have it," he said. "Drink, is it, and your hands trembling, your eyes blazing? Not one drop."

"In God's name, Father——" There was an agony of appeal in his voice.

The priest's hand gripped his shoulder. "In His name, *No!*"

There was a command in his tone that could not be denied. Bruce bowed his head for shame at his weakness. He even tried to smile faintly, as Father Kelly locked the decanter closet and put the key in his pocket; then he dropped wearily into his study chair. Faintly, as though in the distance, he seemed to hear the priest's

voice, but he could not distinguish the words. Everything seemed to have the hazy feeling of a dream.

The thought sent the blood racing through his veins. Might not that be the explanation of this wild phantasmagoria that had been revolving about him? A—a dream. Yes, he felt sure that was it; he was dreaming; he would wake presently, for the rising bell would ring and he would feel his wife's soft hand on his cheek—then they would laugh at this monstrous fancy of his sleep and——

He felt a light hand upon his arm and rose quickly from his chair.

Vera was standing there, looking up into his face with eyes full of tender appeal. He looked down at her and all the sordid squalor of his suspicions came back to him. A dream? No, it was reality.

He waited for a moment without moving. She would say something; she must! But the doubt, suspicion in his eyes chilled Vera. What could she say? Nothing. Her eyes searched the study for Father Kelly, but he had left the room. The gentle closing of the library door told her where he was. Perhaps, he—— She hesitated——

Bruce tore himself away from the soft clasp of her fingers. "Don't touch me," he muttered, and went to the window.

She took a step toward him and the tender curve of her lips quivered, like a child who has been struck a blow. "Bruce," she said, with a pitiful quaver in her voice, "Bruce!"

"Is that all you have to say?" He turned, and his look and tone cut her like a lash.

She put out her hands weakly, despairingly, to him, but he did not move. Then she faced him bravely. "What do you want me to say, Bruce?"

Husband and wife faced each other across the study table; the age old battle of sex was on—there was no parley, no retreat, no compromise possible; the issue must be fought out to the end.

"You might explain!"

His clenched hand rested on the table near her. She wanted to take it in both her own; to lay her cheek upon it; to pity him, pity herself; wrapped about as they were with this coil of misery.

Timidly she put her fingers on his wrist, but he snatched it away, almost as though there were contamination in her touch.

And then the sheer white purity of the woman rose within her; blameless in heart and soul, yes, blameless even in her thoughts, she faced him steadily and her tone was even and true as she asked:

"What do you want me to explain?"

"Explain why you left our bed last night; why you came down to this room!" The suspicion in his tone was like the searing touch of white hot steel to her soul.

She felt a desire to scream; to tear herself to—— But she held herself with a firm hand, and never taking her eyes from his, replied steadily: "I was worried, Bruce; I couldn't sleep. I——"

Harshly he interrupted her. "Who was the man you met here?"

Color flamed into her pale, drawn face at this question and its veiled insinuation. "I met no one," she said in a low, tense tone.

Bruce threw himself violently away from the table to the window.

"There was a man in this room last night. Wait! I missed you; thought you might be ill. I threw on my dressing gown and came to those stairs. The window in that end of the hallway looks out on the grounds." With a gesture he indicated a point directly above the window at his back. "I paused to look out and I saw someone—a man—muffled in his coat, leave this room." He took a step towards her. "Who was he?"

"I don't know, Bruce. Indeed, dear, I—I don't—don't know!"

His clenched hands came together sharply and he paced the length of the room once; then back to her.

"You don't know!" His words were hurled at her in a tone of bitter rebuke. "You don't know! I went over the grounds this morning. I found traces. That man waited out there under the shrubbery; he smoked a cigar while he waited. Then—then, when all was quiet, he came into this room. To meet *you*!" he finished, savagely.

"No, no, no, Bruce!"

"Then why did he come? He wasn't a thief. There's nothing missing. You came down here——"

"Did you see me?" she asked, breathlessly. Perhaps here was a ray of hope. She might appeal to his reason—show him that——

But his tone, charged with the angry fire of jealousy that had burned away his better nature, cut short this thread she had grasped.

"No; Father Kelly shielded you. *But*, you did come; you did come down here to this room!"

She nodded dumbly.

"Why?"

For a moment her lips moved, but no words came from them. Then she threw out her hands with a cry. Father Kelly was right; she must tell Bruce all.

"I will tell you, Bruce," she faltered. "Yes, yes, dear, I'll—I'll tell you everything. Only give me a moment, dear, for you—you know we've never had anything like this come between us before. I—I—thought we never could—I——"

A sob strangled her, but she choked it back fiercely. No, she must not cry. She must fight this out—bring the light of reason back to those staring eyes that looked into hers from the tortured face. It was Bruce, her husband, the man she loved, her other self, and deep down in her heart she felt that she was battling for his love, his reason; perhaps his very life.

The thought steadied her like a cool hand laid upon her own. She drew one deep breath.

"It was Alice," she said, clearly. "She came down here to meet that man!"

"What man?" he flung back at her quickly. Evidently he was trying to trap her—he did not believe——

She fought back her desire to cry out at this merciless thrust; forced herself to answer steadily: "I don't know, Bruce."

The look he gave her reeked with distrust. He went to the door leading to the stairway and threw it wide open. "Call your sister," he said, curtly.

Bewildered, she took a step toward him, and her mind went back to the 'phone message she had received.

A mist gathered before her eyes, then seemed to dissolve slowly. She saw her sister lying upon a cot; doctors, nurses bending over her. Vaguely she looked down at the street dress she wore. Yes, she had put it on to go to Alice—she should be going to the train now—she——

Her husband's voice rasped sharply on her taut nerves. "Call your sister. She can settle this matter. Alice can——"

"Alice isn't here," faltered Vera.

He closed the door and looked at her. "Gore?"

She nodded. The pain in her heart was almost unbearable.

"When?"

"Last night, Bruce; after—after she saw that man."

"Then you do admit that there was a man in this room?"

"Yes; I haven't denied it, have I, dear?"

Bruce waved this admission aside. "Have you heard from your sister?"

"Yes; she—she was knocked senseless by an automobile in the city; taken to Bellevue Hospital."

"When did you know of this?"

"Only—only a few minutes ago."

He paced the room swiftly for a moment and she followed him with yearning eyes.

Then he faced her again and his tone was flint. "Why should your sister meet a man here?"

"I don't know, dear!" And then all the storm

of emotion that she had fought to keep back burst its barriers.

She put out her hands to him; grasped his hands; clung to them; held them as she implored: "Bruce, take me in your arms; trust me; believe in me, dear. I love you—just you—and—and it's the anniversary of our marriage—the day I became yours—the day we—we said for—for better—for worse—till—till death do us part. I haven't forgotten that. I—I never shall—till death do us part! God—you shan't put me away from you—you shall believe in me. Take me in your arms!"

With a face like raw steel he looked down at her—and the anguish in her tone made him waver for a moment; and then he shook his head.

"I can't!" he said in a tone men use when the wound is deep and mortal. "*I can't!* I CAN'T!"

The hands she clung to slipped from her. She staggered and gripped the table.

Defeat faced her, but she fought it back. Not yet—no—not yet, she told herself. While she could move she would struggle for her husband and her happiness.

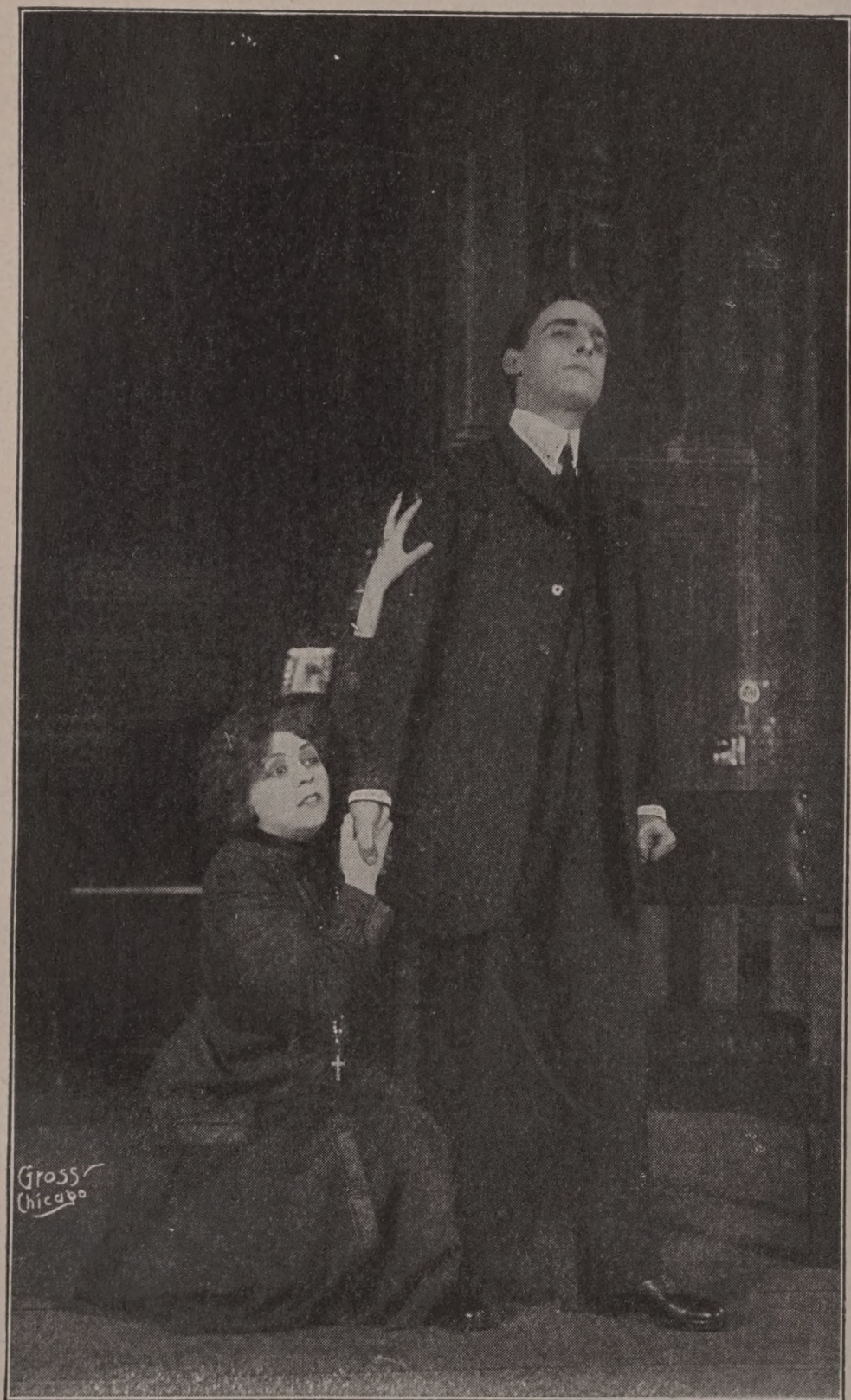
"You doubt me, Bruce?" Half unconsciously she seemed to speak the words.

"Yes!" His reply came like a flash. There was no masking now.

She gave a cry and put her hands over her eyes.

"How could any man help it?" he went on. "I wake in the night. You are gone. I come down those stairs; a man left his room. Who was he?"

"I don't know, Bruce; I don't know!"



"Bruce, take me in your arms"

"You must; you must know!"

"But I don't!" She came to him, and kneeling in the chair he was leaning upon, put both her arms about his neck. He put up his hand to break her clasp, but she held him in spite of his efforts.

"Bruce, Bruce, listen to me! Yes—yes, you must! I love you—love you! There never was anyone else in my life—there never was—there never can be anyone but just you. I love you, dear, love you. Hold me close to you; help me. You are suffering, and it kills me to see you suffer—because I love you, dear, love you!"

"You love me," he threw at her, "but you won't speak! You love me, but you won't explain!"

"I can't, dear; I don't know. I—I——"

Groping in the maze about them both, her mind seized upon a sudden idea; an inspiration, for her hand resting upon the table had touched the 'phone. Alice—yes; that was it.

With a cry of joy she tore the receiver from its hook and spoke: "Central—yes—give me Bellevue Hospital quick. It's Mrs. Wilton. You know the number. Yes, don't delay. Please hurry!"

She turned to Bruce, who was pacing the room. "Wait, dear, only be patient a moment. Alice will tell you who the man was—why he came here, and that he came to see her."

Bruce paused and looked at her. "Why should a man come here unless to see you? Alice is a stranger."

"Wait," she persisted, and turned to the 'phone as a voice called her. "Yes. Is that you, Mr.

O'Hara. Yes, this is Mrs. Wilton. Can I speak to my sister Alice—Miss Marsh? What? I can! It—it won't hurt her? No? Then please connect me—it's important."

She paused and listened, every nerve in her strained to the breaking point. Then a feeble voice, her sister's, thrilled over the wire.

"Vera, is—that—you?" The tone was hardly audible.

"Yes, dear; I'm so sorry!"

"Vera——"

"Don't try to talk, Alice," Vera said, hastily. "Just listen to me. I want you to speak to Bruce; just a word. For God's sake, tell him who that man was who came here last night; and tell him why he came! Oh, my darling, if you love me, tell him all. Yes, Bruce is here."

She turned and handed the receiver to her husband, and her eyes were bright; there was color in her cheeks, hope in her heart. She had found the way at last.

"Bruce," she said, softly, "you've heard every word I've said to Alice. You know there can't be any collusion between us. Now speak to Alice and she will tell you everything."

He took the instrument in his hand and placed it to his ear. When he spoke his voice had a calmer tone. "This is Bruce, Alice. I'm sorry you're hurt. Will you tell me about last night?"

As he listened, disjointed fragments of broken sentences came feebly over the wire, as though the one at the other end was making a supreme effort.

He could only distinguish: "Met him—sur-

prised—talked—must tell—no one. Go in town—come—later—then—I—I—came—down to——”

Bruce broke in hurriedly, for the voice was growing weaker. “Yes, yes; I know you came down to my study. But who was the man in this room?”

“Why—he—he——” came over the wire.

“Did he come here to meet you? Tell me his name!”

“It was—was——” Then silence, except the vague, sibilant whispering of the current.

“Well, well!” cried Vera, nervously.

Bruce shook his head. “She began to say something,” he said. “But now——” he paused a moment and listened. “Now there’s only a confused murmur of voices, and——”

She took the ’phone from him quickly. “Please let me. Central,” she called through it. “Did you cut me off? I——” Her eyes dilated, for clear and sharp came a voice along the wire.

“Is Mrs. Wilton there?”

“Yes,” she replied, and listened. Her eyes widened, a stony calm came over her face. Quietly she put the ’phone down and leaned upon the table.

Bruce took a step toward her, and his voice showed that all the old doubts were back in his mind. “Why didn’t Alice speak to me—why didn’t she tell me——”

Her look checked him. There was something in her face he had never seen there before.

“Alice is dead!”

In the pause he could hear the ticking of the clock and the gentle drip, drip, drip of the rain from the eaves.

"My sister," Vera went on, calmly, stonily; "dead there among strangers; my own, dear sister, dead and—and I wasn't by her side, to hold her hand, kiss her for the last time." With a cry she put out her hands to him, groping for him, and her voice called to him in her agony of grief. "Don't doubt me now, dear, not now. Let me cry my anguish out in your arms. I—I want my husband's love."

And Bruce caught her to him as she staggered blindly; caught her and held her.

The 'phone bell rang.

Vera raised her head and looked up at Bruce.

It rang again, insistently.

With a gesture to her, he went to the table and took up the receiver. "Well?" he called.

"Mr. Wilton. Get him—get him quick—for——"

"This is Wilton at the 'phone."

"Thank God! Been trying to get you——"

"Is that you, Evarts?" he asked. "Yes, well, go on—keep your head, man. I can't understand you. Now, tell me."

Tingling with the nervous tension of the moment, Vera moved toward him. "What is it, Bruce; tell me——"

He was listening excitedly to the words that the wire brought him. A grayish pallor came slowly over his face. There was no tremor in his voice as he said: "Wait! Hold the line! Tell me the particulars when I speak again; tell them exactly!" His hand dropped to his side, and his eyes came up to meet Vera's. There was a look in them that made her heart stop beating.

"Tell me, Bruce dear," she cried, wildly.

"Wait," and he seemed to articulate with difficulty; his hand tore his collar loose, and she could see the cords stand out upon his bared neck.

"Wait. You won't tell me why you came down here last night to meet that unknown man!"

A cry of agony burst from her. So they were back—back again on the same old endless trail of doubt—despair. "I did not! I did not! I did not!" Her voice was hoarse and strident in its agony—her hands beat vainly at the empty air.

"You did, and I'll tell you why." He drew a deep breath and his eyes were steel points of light. "That man was my secret enemy who has been fighting me for months past in Wall Street!"

"No, no, no, Bruce!" was all she could say.

"You were the only one on earth who knew exactly my plan today. You questioned me, drew it from me; made me tell you last night, and—and then while I slept you came down those stairs, met that man and told him; told him everything——"

"No, Bruce, no; on my soul, as I hope for mercy—why—I—I——"

His hand caught her by the shoulder and he forced her into a chair. With one hand he held the receiver to her ear, and spoke into the 'phone. "Now," he said, sharply, "go on, Evarts, tell me."

The trembling tone of his manager came to them both, for Bruce listened at the transmitter.

"I carried out your orders exactly, Mr. Wilton. They were, 'Sell Iowa Central in ten thousand lots until it is forced down to 50.' I did that and then when your stock was sold I went on, as you ordered: 'Sell short, if you have to, but force

Iowa Central to 50.' Someone began to buy at 55. I don't know who it was, but someone who knew, and it went up. I couldn't stem the bull market. It's going up now. Listen: I. C.—I'm reading the tape—I. C., 65, 68, 70, 80, 100. You're short thirty thousand shares, and you haven't a single one to deliver. God! Mr. Wilton! I'm sorry—I——"

Vera gave a cry and started to her feet, both hands pressed tightly over her ears. "Stop it!" she cried in agony; "stop it!"

He caught the receiver as it fell from her shaking hand, and laughed.

"Wait—wait," he cried; "hear the finish. Iowa Central 105, 107, 110. No one knew but you, and the man you told; and you've ruined me."

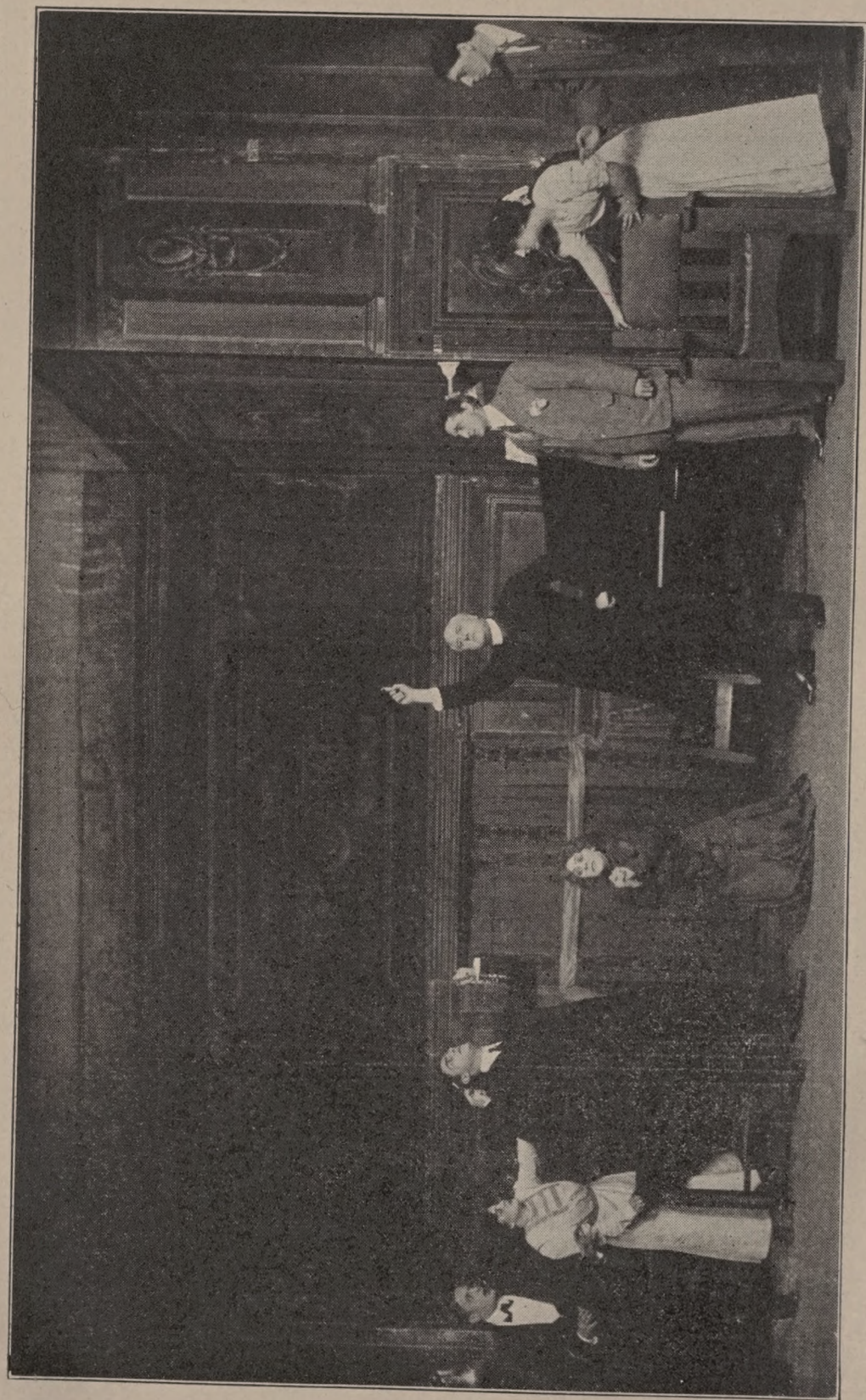
Her hands gripped his shoulder. "Don't stand here; do something—do something!"

Roughly he shook her off and his hand brushed table, 'phone, chair out of the way, as he faced her. "You planned it. All your words of love to me, all your caresses, were lies. Another man owns you. Go to him—go now! But—by God, not with that rosary about your neck. It is the symbol of purity; take it off—give it to me!"

His hand caught the emblem and the cord broke; the shining pearls were scattered upon the floor. Madness was in his eyes. She screamed as she saw a revolver flash from his pocket to his hand.

"Bruce!" she cried, and seized it; "not that—in God's name—no!"

He shook her off so roughly that she staggered back.



..... "and the cross upon the Rosary"

"Yes, this,—it's all that's left me. Ruin has come. I'll end it all. Your God has deserted me!"

Father Kelly parted the curtains at the arch. He raised his hand in entreaty. "Bruce!" he cried.

But the crazed man lifted the weapon to his temple.

Vera put out her hands blindly, and they touched the drawn curtains at the window. Then, in one breathless space, she felt the answer to her prayer for help—it was there under her hand.

"Bruce!" she cried, and tore the curtains from their fastenings.

Behind them, in a golden frame, was a picture of the Christ in a harmony of glass. So true was the artist's work that it seemed as though a living being stood there, with hands extended, a look of entreaty on the spiritual face.

"No," said the priest, solemnly. "God speaks to you now through his only Son, and the cross upon the rosary."

Sunbeams stole into the room. They lighted the picture softly. Birds began to sing.

Bruce dropped the revolver and put his hands before his face; then with a cry he rushed through the open window.

Vera tried to follow him, but a great wall of blackness seemed to rise before her. She felt herself falling—through immeasurable depths.

Father Kelly caught her and placed her gently on a couch. He stood over her, his face uplifted and the sunlight fell full upon him.

"Father," he said softly. "Give me the power to bring them back to love and to Thee!"

CHAPTER XVII

"THE MOVING FINGER WRITES"

THE stout man with the expansive chest and the rather clamorous Spring suit, halted his motor at the intersection of Broadway and Wall Street. With some laughing difficulty, he deposited his genial and ample bulk on the curb, and waved his hand to his driver.

"Right, Sam," he said, jovially; "walk the rest of the way to my office."

The colored driver smiled and ducked his head, and the car, rather gaudy in its decorations, made a slow turn and shot uptown.

Alone on the corner the rotund man looked after him and shook his head.

"Respectable to look at," he said, "but a joy rider at heart. I beg pardon!" as he came in abrupt contact with a hurrying pedestrian.

The party to this collision also muttered an apology, then changed it to a phrase of recognition. "Isn't this Major Thomas?" he asked.

"Yes, of course; and you—well, by all the strange gods of Manhattan, if it isn't Evarts!"

The other nodded, and the stout man noticed that he seemed a little ill at ease. He linked his arm through Evarts' and began a voluble monologue.

"Good to see you, Evarts. Only got back yesterday; Brazil—rubber, and if you make the usual joke about it, I'll push you into the street."

It was ten o'clock of a fine July morning, and the sidewalk was thronged. Major Thomas tried to keep up his conversation and, at the same time, steer his bulk through the crowd, but the narrowness of the way and the haste of the throng made this a feat of some difficulty.

Finally he paused before the ornate front of a café and mopped his glowing face.

"Say," and he smiled jovially at Evarts. "I can't chauffeur this two hundred and thirty chassis of mine and chin too, so let's drop in here through the swing doors, and recall that chaste remark made by the governor of a southern state to another governor of another state just a few degrees more southern; what?" and drowning any remonstrance from his companion with a laugh, he drew him gently through the green baize doors and up to the bar.

"Pete," he called genially to the be-aproned alert young man behind the bar, who greeted him effusively. "Pete, here's a friend of mine and he's suffering; ask him what'll help him quickest?"

The attendant turned to Evarts and his friend went on: "If he says mineral water, Pete, don't listen."

"A lemonade," ventured Evarts, smiling in a half questioning way at his big friend.

Thomas considered the order for a moment as though it were a question of international importance.

"Well," he decided, finally, "it's a matter between you and your conscience. Pete, mix me one of those things that makes a Kentucky gentle-

man long for home and mother," and his laugh made the glasses dance.

"Brazil," he went on, in answer to Evarts' question; "Oh, yes, I was telling you about old Braz—when that red headed mullet of a messenger boy knocked the wind out of me. Well, Brazil's all right, and rubber; always leads in the stretch—see!" He laughed again, and then his voice grew grave. "You know, Evarts, I got caught in Iowa Central about a year ago, and I had to do something to take the crimp out of my bank roll."

He paused and then looked at Evarts with a sudden recollection. "Why, you—weren't you mixed up in it, too?"

Evarts smiled. "Yes, all I had saved went, and—— Well that didn't matter so much, Major; we who play the game down here, who have grown grey hanging over the tape—we—well, we look upon the ups and downs as the fortunes of war. No—I didn't care so much about myself. It was what happened to a friend of mine." He paused and shook his head slowly.

Thomas nodded. "Went under, eh? Well, never mind; he'll come back at the market."

"I'm afraid not," and Evarts looked down despondently.

"Well," laughed his friend, "grab that high glass before you, and you'll see things differently. Ah, I forgot, yours was—lemonade; well that makes a difference," and with another laugh he buried his expansive face in the mint that odorously covered the tinkling ice in his glass.

Evarts smiled and sipped at his lemonade.

"Fine, Pete," commented Thomas to the young man behind the bar, who smiled his appreciation of the compliment. Then he turned to Evarts again, and his forehead drew into knots of introspection.

"Funny thing, that Iowa Central deal, old man. Ever find out what made the stock do that Wright brothers act? You know—fly—up—up—see?" He smiled at what he felt was a good joke.

"No," replied Evarts, slowly. "No one knows to this day; it's a Wall Street secret that has been kept faithfully." He paused and struck his clenched fist on the bar. "But I know this: whoever it was acted on inside information, and bought with one idea—to ruin Bruce Wilton! Why——"

He stopped abruptly, and Thomas, following his intent gaze, saw that the curtains had parted before one of the spaces partitioned off for greater privacy, and that a man stood there.

About him was that indescribable air that clings to men who have given up the fight. Men who have gone down to the depths, and though they can see the blue sky above and hear the cheery voices in the battle going on above them, know that for them it is over, ended.

His clothes hung to his stooped shoulders and emaciated frame; they were unpressed, wrinkled into baggy folds; his hair was long and unkempt and his eyes showed deep hollows of suffering.

"Someone called me, didn't they, Pete?" he asked, hoarsely.

The bartender nodded towards the two men, who were silently watching, and then, seeing something in the man's eyes, started towards him.

Evarts put out his hand and stayed him. "I spoke your name, Mr. Wilton," he said, "but I didn't know you were there, sir."

"Ah, it's Evarts, eh? All right," and Bruce held out his hand.

His old manager took it with deference and affection. "You're looking better today, Mr. Wilton," he said, and then, recollecting, turned to his companion. "This is Mr. Wilton, Major Thomas, you've often heard me speak of him."

"Sure," laughed the Major; "join us, Mr. Wilton," and then he noticed that Evarts was shaking his head at him behind Wilton.

"Brandy," said Bruce, shortly, and rested his elbow wearily upon the bar.

Pete put out the decanter, reluctantly the Major thought, and then he saw that Bruce filled his glass to the brim. He raised his brows slightly at Evarts, who smiled sadly.

Bruce set down the decanter and raised his glass unsteadily. "Brandy," he said, smiling a queer, crooked smile; "brandy is the king. Drink four and your brain stops buzzing. You can't think. That's a blessing. Drink a dozen and you've got Morgan and Rockefeller distanced in the race for dollars."

"I was just talking," said the Major, biting off the end of a cigar and feeling for a match; "just talking—— Thanks, Pete, old pal. Talking about that Iowa Central deal——"

He struck the match to a flame and failed to see Pete's warning gesture or hear Evarts' warning exclamation.

The mischief had been done. Bruce dashed

the glass he held upon the tessellated floor and turned upon Major Thomas. "What do you know about Iowa Central? Do you know anything? If you do, let's have it, quick. Well?"

His wild staring eyes confronted the stout man, who stood amazed at this abrupt change.

But the Major had not earned his title in a drawing room. He had been under fire; had seen the sun rise from the deck of a filibuster. Friends had often complimented him on his nerve.

He showed that he possessed that useful quality now, for he applied the blazing match to the end of his cigar, extinguished it and puffed calmly at his weed for a moment, but he never took his cold gray eyes from the blazing pair before him.

"Why, yes," he remarked, casually, after a pause. "I was just asking Evarts if he knew the inside story of that deal."

"Do you know anything about it—do you?"

Thomas shook his head. "If I did, Mr. Wilton, I wouldn't be asking questions about it, would I, old man?"

"No, no; of course not. But someone knows."

His voice rose high and he clenched his hand and shook it above his head. Evarts laid his hand upon his arm, but he shook it off angrily and went on.

"Somewhere in this world there's a man walking among men, laughing, happy, rich—a man, a devil, who brought me down to this; ruined my life, tore the heart out of me—left me a wreck—that's what I am, a wreck."

The baize doors flew open and a tall, carefully

groomed man entered quickly and glanced hurriedly about the room.

Evarts caught him by the arm. "I'm glad you came, Mr. Wright," he said, and nodded toward Bruce, who had dropped his head on his hands at the bar.

"Bad again, eh?" Kenward said, calmly. He looked a trifle older. There were fine lines about his eyes and a suspicion of gray showed at his temples. "Bruce," he said, touching him lightly with his tan gloved hand.

"Ken, old boy." Bruce raised his head and seized his friend's hand. "Mr. Kenward Wright," he introduced him to the Major, "and the best friend a man ever had. Will you have a drink, gentlemen?"

Kenward shook his head. "Not now, Bruce. Come, I want you to take a ride with me; my motor's outside. Joe," he signalled to the waiting driver, who came forward and took Bruce respectfully by the arm.

The outburst had benumbed Bruce's mind. He allowed himself to be led, muttering, through the door and into the tonneau of the smart car.

Kenward turned to Evarts. "Sanitarium," he explained briefly. "Only way. Doctor saw him yesterday. Diagnosis—verge of paranoia. Too bad; fine fellow."

They nodded sympathetically. Kenward bowed and opened the door. Oh, Evarts," he said, "just a moment; you haven't heard anything of Mrs. Wilton, have you?"

Evarts shook his head. "Nothing, Mr. Wright, and I've tried; I'm still trying."

Kenward put his hand on his shoulder. "That's right; keep at it," he said. "Strange, she seems to have dropped out of life."

"Yes," assented Evarts, and then, as Kenward started for the door, he put in a last word: "That priest, Father Kelly, has been around looking for Mr. Wilton."

Kenward paused with the door half open. "Did he see him?" he asked.

"No, Mr. Wright; I wish he had, but Mr. Wilton keeps away from him. Father Kelly explained to me that he wanted to see his friend regarding the dedication of that new chapel."

Kenward paused in the clipping of a cigar end and thought a moment. "Ah, yes; the Chapel of the Rosary," he said, absently. "I remember, we talked about it that evening at Bruce's about a year ago."

"Just a year ago," Evarts broke in. "Tomorrow's the eleventh of July. Just a year ago to-day Mr. Wilton called me into his office and showed me a rosary of wonderful pearls he had bought for his wife."

"What did Father Kelly say about the new chapel?" Kenward persisted.

"Well, you know when the crash came, Father Kelly wanted Mr. Wilton to take the money he had laid aside for the building and use it; but Mr. Wilton couldn't be found. He had just dropped out of things. I never did know where he was for six months."

"Panama, Nicaragua, South America," supplied Kenward. "Bruce told me; fought in two of their biennial revolutions; got the fever and——" he finished with an expressive gesture.

"So there was nothing for the trustees to do but go on with the chapel, according to Mr. Wilton's deed of gift."

"It's finished, the chapel, I mean?" asked Kenward, watching through the half open door, the crumpled up figure of Bruce in the tonneau of his car.

Evarts nodded slowly. "And that's why Father Kelly called. The dedication is tomorrow. I think he hoped Mr. Wilton might come to it."

"Better not, I think." Kenward shook his head and lighted the cigar between his teeth. "Well, so long, Evarts. Pardon, Major, just going over matters about——" he nodded toward Bruce in his car. "Glad to have met you."

The doors closed on him, and they heard the whirr of the motor rise to a sharp crescendo, then die away as the car carried them toward Broadway.

No one spoke for a few minutes. Pete paused in his work of polishing the mahogany surface before him.

Major Thomas leaned thoughtfully over the bar, drawing queer geometric figures on its shining surface with the bottom of his empty glass.

Evarts came slowly towards them, his head down, his bony hands locked behind his back, pondering deeply.

The roar of the street came to them, subdued to a deep, almost musical tone, an accompaniment to their thoughts. So still it was in the room that the tinkling drip of a leaking water pipe could be heard plainly; over a little pool of spilled brandy on the floor a bibulous blue bottle fly buzzed thirstily.

Major Thomas jerked his head toward the door. "Down and Out Club for his," he said, slowly.

"Don't, Major!" Evarts put up his hand quickly.

"Truth," replied his bulky friend. "He's on his way. Fill 'em up again, Pete."

The man thus summarily disposed of sat up a little straighter on the broad leather seat in the car. A breeze from the harbor, laden with the tang of the sea, brought a lingering trace of color to his sallow face.

"We lay there in the jungle," he said, slowly, as if something in the air had touched a chord of memory which sprang into words. "Lay there all day; hotter than the Hades they describe from their pulpits," he laughed, harshly. "Toward nightfall the wind shifted and blew from the sea. We crept down on them; some two hundred of us. My company, ragged, shoeless, fever ridden—shaking hands and yellow blotched faces. Then, crash went our volley, and we were on them." He paused and smiled crookedly. "Funny though, through all that blare of bugles and yells, the rattle of rifles and the smoke, I saw—saw Vera's face." His eyes widened at the memory of it.

Kenward took him almost roughly by the arm. "Where is she?" he asked; and then softly: "Where is Vera; do you know?"

"There, right ahead of us!" His eyes stared and a smile came over his pain racked face. "Waiting in the little arbor, to serve tea, and put her arms about my neck and lay her soft cheek to

mine; then I'll give her this rosary I've bought for her——" His hand fumbled at his breast pocket. He caught Kenward's eye.

With a snarl he threw his friend's hand from him, and drew away to the corner of the tonneau. "Let me alone, can't you! I—I want to sleep, and—and forget."

He drew his coat collar up about his face and closed his eyes wearily. Kenward looked at him and shook his head sadly. The car rolled on and on.

At the intersection of a busy thoroughfare, the driver reduced his pace to a mere crawl, to allow a stream of pedestrians to cross from one side to the other.

Among them was a slender woman in a faded black gown, a veil drawn over her face.

Half way across she paused, at a warning exclamation from the officer on duty there. She raised her head, and her eyes behind her veil took in the luxurious car and its occupants.

The bundle dropped from her hands—the car went swiftly uptown towards Westchester.

"Narrow shave that for you, ma'am," said the policeman, not unkindly.

She nodded; her eyes were fixed upon the rapidly receding auto.

He stooped and recovered the bundle, dusted it clumsily and held it out to her. Then he saw the direction of her gaze; that she was not looking at him.

He touched her on the arm. Something about her made this surly guardian of the law strangely tender.

With a quick start she turned, took it from his hands and nodded.

"Thank you, officer."

He noted that her voice was soft and low.

"Oh, that's all right," he said, a little awkwardly. Then he saw that she had turned and was gazing in the direction the car had taken.

"Friends of yours?" he ventured, tentatively.

She bowed, then looked about her in a strange, dazed way and melted into the crowd.

It was July 10, and the hour was one o'clock.

CHAPTER XVIII

TO THE CHAPEL OF THE ROSARY

THE brown haired woman, sewing swiftly at the kitchen table, looked up from her work. Behind the newspaper on the opposite side, the man, square jawed, muscular, with sharp eyes and hair streaked with gray, surveyed her tolerantly.

"Got something on your mind, Lou?" he inquired.

She nodded, but threaded her needle carefully before she spoke. "How did you know, Jim?"

"Oh, I know you," he laughed, and turned his paper. "Well," he added, after a pause, "what new bug has stung you now; give it a name." He struck a match and surveyed her grinning behind its flame, as he held it to his short clay pipe.

"Jim, I've a good mind to go down and speak to her."

"Well, why don't you; no rope holding you, is there?"

"How do you know who I mean?"

"Lord!" He allowed the newspaper to fall upon his knees and chuckled softly as he studied her affectionately.

She was worth more than a passing look. There was strength and purpose in her plain face. The eyes were alive with spirit and good nature. Her figure, not overtall, was clean cut, and though feminine in its soft curves, showed, as she moved, athletic power.

She smiled back at him and patted his big hand as it lay carelessly on the table.

"How?" she repeated, leaning forward, her elbows on her knees.

He puffed and ruminated for a moment, holding her hard hand very gently in his.

"As if I'd heard anything but Her since you took the notion to sew in Bernstein's shop," he said. "Though I never saw her close to, I could give a picture of her."

His voice rose to a higher pitch, in what he fondly imagined was her feminine tone. "'Oh, Jim, she's that sweet and beautiful, you can't imagine. Just to look at her is to think of pansies, and roses, and lilies of the valley. Hazel eyes, kind of brownish, and about my size, maybe a little taller; little hands and tiny feet, and her hair fine spun gold, and all her own, and——'" He broke off, with a laugh. "Say, ain't I the real kid with the photographic eye, eh?"

She threw his hand from her smiling. "Rats, I don't talk like that, Jim!"

"Well, that's what you said; and every day it's been something new. "'She looked awful pale today, Jim,' or 'Oh, Jim, I know she's been crying,' or——"

"Don't joke about her, Jim," she put in impatiently. "She's in trouble, somehow, I can tell."

"You mean——" An expressive gesture completed the sentence. Trouble to him meant only one thing.

"No, no!" she shook her head. "Not that."

Can't you imagine anything worrying a man or woman but the police?"

"That's enough to keep you up nights sometimes." He shook his head, reminiscently. "Remember when we used to be—*wanted*? Oh, say, I meet up the other day with Detective Nailer; did I tell you? No? Well, I ran right into him. 'Hello, Nitro,' says he, 'going straight, they tell me. Say, is it just a plant, or is it on the level?' 'Level,' I says, looking him straight in the eye. 'You could back me up to a safe now,' I says, 'put nitro in my hand, just leave me there and go home to bed without worrying about your money.'" He smoked a moment, thoughtfully. "Somehow, he seemed disappointed. You know, I believe the cops hate to see a crook turn square."

After a pause he looked up and added: "You ain't heard a word I've been saying, have you?"

She shook her head, "I'm worried about her, Jim."

"Lord, go down and see her and get it over."

The woman rose and threw down the garment on which she had been working, and took a hesitating step toward the shabby pine door.

"Go on," he urged. "Why don't you go down and see her, if you want to do it?"

"I don't know, Jim; only—well, she's different from the rest of us, somehow. She's a lady. A real lady, and—and—well, I——" She looked down at her own plain dress and held up her rough, red hands.

"I guess my wife is there some, too, with that lady stuff," he put in, belligerently, doubling up a

professional looking fist. "Leastways it wouldn't be real healthy for some guy to come in here and say she wasn't."

Her arms flew about his powerful neck, and she hugged his gray head closely to her breast. "You're all right, Jim," she faltered. "But——"

"Are you crying, Lou?" he asked, after a pause, releasing himself and turning to her in his chair. "Why, I never saw you cry but once, and that was when I was sent up for——"

"Don't, Jim," she broke in, impatiently, dashing her hand across her eyes. "You're making it harder for me to go down to her every minute. Why, think of it. I to go down there after all I've been. I, who used to be—— No, no, I couldn't; I just couldn't."

"Well, then, I wouldn't, if I felt that way," he said. "I'd pass it up."

"No, I'm going, Jim," and the door closed on her.

Jim looked after her and listened a moment to the sound of her quick, energetic step in the hallway descending the uncarpeted stairs. Then he whistled reflectively and looked about him, smiling, for a match.

"Can you beat 'em?" he asked of no one in particular, as he resumed his study of the critical baseball situation. "Can—you—beat 'em? No, you can't."

* * * * *

The slight, girlish figure watching the little tea-kettle come to a boil over the oil stove, turned with a start as a knock sounded on the pine door of her cramped, hall room.

"Come in," she said, softly, and a little breathlessly, for who could be coming to pay her a call?

Lou opened the door timidly and there was a moment's awkward pause.

"I came down," she began, "because—well, I just had to come. I——" she stopped, confused.

"I'm very glad you did." The voice was very soft and modulated. "Won't you sit down. I'm just brewing some tea, and perhaps you'd like a cup."

Lou nodded and sat down a little stiffly. The refined accent, the gentle tone and the acceptance of her abrupt visit confirmed the opinion she had given Jim upstairs.

"A lady; a real lady," she thought to herself. And then her feminine eyes asserted their traditional rights and swept the room with one all comprehending look.

It was narrow, cramped, confined. The single cot bed occupied a third of the restricted space. One window, a painted wooden bureau near it, a tiny table, one chair, a trunk, washstand in the corner, with its hideous shape of bowl and pitcher. The oil stove rested on a diminutive packing box.

One scant half minute's pause this inventory took and then the small details were gathered by her keen eyes. Everything spotless; a few well thumbed books on the table. Two small framed pictures, attractive and well hung; a steamer rug covering the couch, and, yes, soft white muslin curtains over the window.

Exact time consumed in this complete and carefully catalogued survey, which included every

small item of the loose clinging house dress and the plain gold ring upon the slender finger; exact and authentic time one minute.

"Can you beat 'em?" Jim was asking upstairs at this moment. "Can you beat 'em?"

"Tea," repeated Lou, mendaciously. "Now ain't that funny. I was just saying to Jim up in our room, how I'd like a cup of tea."

She took the cup from the delicate hand that offered it and was glad to see a smile on the pale, sweet face.

"Jim?" The inflexion of the tone was questioning.

"My husband," a little proudly. Then she nodded her head, "and all right, too." She looked at her hostess' slim hand. "You're married?"

A look of pain came into the hazel eyes.

Lou saw it and changed the subject with a dart of anger towards herself.

"Great tea, Mrs.——" She paused a moment, hesitatingly.

"Weldon," came the answer, very softly.

The woman sipped her tea a moment before she went on. "Perhaps you'll think it strange, Mrs. Weldon, my coming down here this way, but I just had to come—because—well, I've felt for days working beside you there that you needed a friend. You know, I'm queer that way; somehow I sense things. Why, Jim used to say I could tell a detective——" She paused and broke off suddenly with a laugh.

"There I go," she went on, putting down her cup on the trunk. "Jim put it into my head, I guess, before I came down, talking about the po-

lice. Well, you might as well know, I s'pose; there ain't any secret about it. Jim and I were crooks."

"Really?" Her listener bent forward, a look of interest on her face.

"Sure; Jim blew safes and I—well, I helped Jim. Funny thing how we came to turn square. Like to hear about it?"

"Very, very much, and I'm so glad you—and Jim, is it?—did turn square. Tell me."

Lou saw that the girlish face had taken on some little color and that the look of pain had left the hazel eyes.

"Fine," she commented, mentally, to herself. "Get her mind off of what's worrying her."

"Well," she went on, "it was the strangest thing what turned us. Jim was—wanted. The police were looking for him, and we were under cover. I used to go out early after grub, but Jim—he kept dark. One morning I went for some milk." She paused. "Early, sun wasn't up, and I met a boy we helped once out in Chicago. Jim was framing up a big job. I knew this kid would come in handy, so I says, 'Come up.' Well, he looked at me and shook his head. 'I've turned square; there's nothing in this crooked game. You and Jim——'" She paused and her voice grew serious as she recalled the words that had meant so much to her. "'You and Jim are fighting eighty millions of people!'"

"And you were," broke in the gentle voice of her listener.

"Of course; but I didn't know it. Neither did Jim. I went up those four flights mighty slow, thinking.

"Jim was working on a new brace bit to drill holes in a safe. He looked up as I came in, and saw something in my face, I guess.

"‘Cops?’ he asks, short and sharp. ‘No,’ I says, putting down the milk slow and careful. ‘No, Jim; only we’re in wrong, you and I; there’s nothing in this crooked game,’ I says. ‘You and I are fighting eighty millions of people.’ I waited a minute to let that sink in, and I saw it did, for it hit him hard. His jaw kind of dropped. ‘Now,’ I says, ‘one word does it, Jim; which is it to be, right from this minute: straight or crooked?’ He studied over it a minute, and then, all at once, a change came over his face.

"He just heaved that new brace bit across the room. ‘Straight,’ he says, and he took me in his arms."

She paused, for two soft hands clasped hers and she saw that "the lady" had dropped down on the floor by her and was looking up into her face, eagerly.

"Go on, please; you don't know how much good this is doing me. It's been so long since I've talked with anyone—— Oh, please go on!"

"Well," laughed Lou, "that's about all. Jim squared it somehow and got a job. I got one, too. We went back to our real name, Markham. Jim went to work—watchman in an iron foundry.

"‘I'll begin there, Lou,’ he says, ‘because I'm some uncertain about myself in this straight game; whether I can be on the level; and I know I can't steal that pig iron—it weighs a ton.’"

They both laughed a moment at this ingenious thought of Jim's; then "the lady" spoke softly:

"And you turned to a new life all because of that boy's words?"

"Yes," returned Lou. "He was a wonder, that kid. Happy go lucky, full of his jokes. Why, he told me that morning that the way he came to turn square was that he broke into a house, a priest's house——"

The soft hands tightened upon hers and she looked down to meet a wondering look in "the lady's" face.

"He broke into a priest's house——"

The lady had risen quickly and moved away from her a little. Her eyes were large and round with wonder, there was a smile on her face. "A priest's house," she repeated, slowly; "was his name, that boy's name, Skeeter?"

"Yes, Mrs. Weldon, and——"

"The priest was Father Kelly! Dear, dear, Father Kelly."

Lou nodded. "Skeeter went to work for a Wall Street man. Jim met him once. Then the man went broke and——"

She paused and caught her breath sharply as she rose to her feet.

Headlines in the yellow journals came back to her: "Broker Goes Down In Crash." "Panic in I. C. Ruins Bruce Wilton." "Wife of Ruined Broker Missing."

She took a step forward for "the lady" seemed swaying. A question rose to her lips, looked out from her eyes. "Then you——"

"Yes," the lady whispered. "Yes." Then she turned a little away and went to the window.

A hand fell on her shoulder—kindly, faithfully.

"You don't want to talk?"

The lady shook her head.

"Can I help you?"

The same negative gesture.

"I won't say a word, not even to Jim; you can trust me."

Soft hands closed thankfully over hers. Lou went towards the door. Something in the faded black dress laid out upon the couch stopped her. She ventured a question: "You're not going away, *Mrs. Weldon*?"

The lady smiled softly. "Just for tomorrow, early. Mr. Bernstein has given me a holiday. Don't worry if I'm not in my place. Come down and see me in the evening."

"I will, Mrs. Weldon, and, and—well, if there's anything Jim or I can do, you can count on us. Good night."

There was a tender sympathy in the way Lou closed the door and went carefully up the bare stairs.

The lady looked about her narrow room, and then she extinguished the lamp. She went to the window and her eyes gazed at the stars—as she knelt there.

"Tomorrow!" she said, softly. "I'll lie down now for a few hours, and then early—very early, long before the first faint streaks of dawn—I'll go out—there; out to Westchester, and, and see my old home, and Father Kelly's Chapel of the Rosary."

She dropped her head upon her folded hands and murmured in a whisper: "Bruce, my own, my own dear husband. God help you and bring you back to me!"

The street was very quiet. A few fleecy clouds swam in the deep blue of the sky—far in the distance a city clock chimed on the Summer air.

It was July 10; the hour was ten o'clock.

* * * * *

Luke McKelvin, outside guard at Dr. Wylie's Westchester Sanitarium, came to his feet suddenly from a bench by the lodge gate, and rubbed his eyes.

He had dropped down there for a moment in his lonely tour of the grounds, and he felt uneasily that he had dozed in the gentle Summer night air.

Yawning, he held his old silver watch to the light of the gate lamp and grinned sheepishly at what it told him.

"Asleep," he muttered. "Well, what do ye know about that? Asleep on picket duty. Sergeant, take this man out and shoot him." Luke had been a soldier in his time.

Then he started on his half completed round of the institution.

"I wonder," he said, slowly, "if I dreamed it, or did someone come down that path on their tiptoes and try the gate." It was locked now, at all events, as his hand told him. He shook his head and went on, with watchful eyes and wide open ears.

All about him clung the July night, very soft, still, odorous with the scent of opening buds and bursting blossoms. Beyond the range of hills to the west the moon was just disappearing, her silver pathway free from any cloud in the aether. So still it was he could hear the gurgle of the

little brook that crossed the grounds at the eastern edge; far off to the north a dog barked.

Luke looked about him and nodded slowly, with appreciation. "Pretty," he said, low, to himself. "No wonder a man drops off for forty winks on a night like this."

And then he paused and his eyes contracted. The shrubbery on his right was broken, as though someone, in desperate haste, had passed that way. He dropped on his knee and with a match examined the soft earth.

Yes, footprints—running—leading from the main hall to——. He rose to his feet to get the exact direction—to that half repaired break in the wall.

"Fourth window from the end," he said as he ran swiftly toward the hall. "Second floor. He could get down that drain pipe all right. I wasn't dreaming; tried the gate and then made for that break in the wall."

Quickly the night attendant physician aroused the doctor.

"The new patient, Wilton, gone?" he said.

"Call his friend, Mr. Wright," replied the doctor, as he threw on his clothes. "Yes, he's here; remained over for the night. I thought it best—insisted. Glad I did now. Hurry and wake him, Maddox."

And while they prepared to take up the fugitive's trail, a man, in the darkness, was plunging straight on over hills, through meadows and streams, bareheaded, with straining eyes, looking out wildly from their sockets, torn by brambles and thick underbrush, staggering, reeling, gasp-

ing—but still on and ever on, straight as the hawk flies, with that unerring instinct that always lives and directs the course; on and ever on, until breasting a hill, he saw below him the cool, white walls of a chapel.

Then, putting out his hands with an inarticulate cry of joy, he staggered down the hill and fell forward on the marble steps, one hand stretched out toward the heavy, oaken doors, his face in the soft grass.

It was July 10, and the hour was eleven o'clock.

* * * * *

A single candle of purest wax, burning upon the altar, lighted the interior of the Chapel of the Rosary. By its dim light the shadowy outlines of massive pillars, groined roof, the rows on rows of empty pews were seen. It was stately in its simple richness, beautiful in the harmony of outline and true proportions. There seemed written in its every corner—engraved upon each stone and frieze the invisible words: "Conceived and executed by Love."

Before the altar, with outstretched arms and clasped hands, knelt a man in the cassock of a priest. The slender rays of the wax taper lighted his face. It was thin, gaunt, drawn to sharp lines of spiritual effort and travail. His eyes were closed and his face raised to the vaulted ceiling, the lips were moving as he prayed.

It was July the 10th and the hour was midnight.

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE GRAY DAWN

KATHLEEN had risen very early on the morning of July 11. She felt worried about Uncle Brian, for as the time had gone by and the day of the dedication of the Chapel of the Rosary drew near, he had grown more and more silent. His manner was tender toward her, but she felt a vague aloofness about him, as though his mind dwelt upon unseen things.

It was not yet dawn when she stole to his room. The door stood wide open, and stepping inside, she saw that the bed was undisturbed. She shook her head sadly, and went down the stairs and out through their little garden. Only across the way towered the new chapel.

In the hush that always precedes the dawn of another day she picked her way up the little rise toward it. The edifice loomed large, placed as it was on a break in the hill. Its front façade faced the east.

Kathleen paused before it for a moment, and then, skirting its main portal, went toward the door of the sacristy, where she felt sure she would find her uncle. As she came toward it she gave a slight start, for a man stood there. She paused for a moment, undecided what she should do, and while she waited the man spoke.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but is this the Chapel of the Rosary?"

"Yes, sir," she replied slowly. Something in the tone of his voice stirred her memory strangely. "Yes, sir, it is to be dedicated at early mass today." She drew her breath quickly, for, quite near him now, she had caught sight of his face and felt that she knew him. "Didn't you work for Mr. Wilton a year ago, sir?" she asked.

He looked at her a moment and then put out his hand. "Sure I did, and I remember you, Miss O'Connor. My name is Lee Martin. I've come to the dedication. Shake!"

They gravely shook hands, and Kathleen went on: "You made me laugh that night, do you remember?"

Lee sighed. "Yes, Miss O'Connor, I was too fond of my jokes in those days. I've changed since then!"

"You have, Mr. Martin?"

He looked down at the sombre black suit he was wearing and shifted the battered umbrella to his other hand. "Don't you notice the clothes I've got on?"

She nodded. Even in the uncertain light the alteration was apparent. "What changed you?" she asked.

He smiled feebly. "What sends all of us fellows dotty? A girl!"

"Who," she asked, her interest growing; "the one who worked there?"

"Yes," he nodded. "The original sober-faced, Bellows Falls, champion non-laughter, Lesura."

"Why!" she exclaimed, her eyes opening wide; "she wasn't exactly the kind I'd think that you —."

"Neither would I, Miss O'Connor. That's what hands me an awful laugh when I think of it. But I tried so hard to make her laugh I got interested and——" his expressive gesture finished the sentence.

"Do you expect to meet her here?" she asked.

"Why not?" You know we were all to be here at the dedication. Mrs. Wilton made us promise that night."

A train of recollection started in her mind. "What has become of—of—Mr. Harrow?" she asked.

"Say," he replied, coming nearer, "it got you, too, didn't it?"

She nodded and caught her breath in a little sob. "Yes, I—I—do love him—I'm not afraid to say so. Do you know where he is?"

"No, Miss O'Connor, I don't. Something hit us all that night. Mr. Wilton gone to smash—and—and—Miss Vera——" His voice broke and he turned sharply away. "Well, I'll just go up the hill and look at the old place."

The mist rising from the teeming earth swallowed his short, athletic figure, and Kathleen turned to the sacristy door; and then through the early morning air she heard a clear, melodious whistle. She paused for a moment on the step. The refrain was an old Irish air, "*The Enniskillen Dragoons*." She followed it for a moment, her hand beating time, a smile upon her lips. So intent was she upon the tune that she did not see the man who came towards her through the early morning mist, until a voice sounded close beside her.

"And how'll that be after striking ye?" it asked.

Turning quickly, with a gasp, she looked intently at the tall form clad in Irish corduroys. Then she gave a little cry of delighted surprise and clasped her hands. "Charley!" she cried; "Charley Harrow!"

He stepped away from her almost disdainfully, and took off his hat with a flourish. She noted that about it he wore a broad band of green ribbon. "Not Harrow. O'Harrow, if ye plaze." There was the burr of old Erin in his manner of speech.

A great light burst in on her; she clasped her hands. "That's where you went—to——"

"Back to Ireland—to the green shores of *Erin Go-Bragh!* For, sure, and didn't ye say I wasn't Irish enough for ye?"

She nodded.

"I made tracks for a steamer the day you said that. 'Take me to Ireland,' I cried, and faith, they did. I searched, questioned, investigated, and do you know what I found?" He threw out his chest proudly. "Me ancestor came from *Bal-lanahinch, in Roscommon County, near Mayeuth.*"

"Ye don't tell me?" Kathleen cried in delighted surprise and joy, her face beaming.

"It's the truth. Didn't ye ask me about Brian Boru?"

"I did, and you made me angry by calling him a ball player."

He nodded and she saw that he wore a wonderful green tie. "I take shame to myself that I ever said those words, for I know him now—that

mighty king who held Ireland in his hand, drove out the *Danes*, defeated them at Glenamoy in *Wicklow* in the year nine hundred and ninety-nine. He took a handkerchief of vivid green from his pocket, and she gasped:

"Wonderful!" It was her tribute to this display of historical accuracy.

Charley flaunted the green handkerchief toward her; upon it was embroidered the likeness of a harp. "I've a small ancestor or two," he said modestly, "who fought by his side that same day."

She made no reply to this. His news was overwhelming.

"I've walked from Kinsale," he went on, "that looks out on the salt sea, to Marvin Head; I've bathed in the Shannon's sweet water; walked up and down the Giant's Causeway; kissed the Blarney Stone——"

"I knew that," she cried, laughing, but there were tears in her eyes; his devotion touched her.

"And here"—he put his hand into the breast pocket of his coat and his voice was low and tender—"here's a sprig of real shamrock that I picked from the mist-laden hills of old Erin."

Kathleen took the spray of green with a low cry of joy and pressed it to her lips. "The blessed shamrock," she said. "Ah, Charley, think how it grows in that dear old land, and of the brave men who have watered it with their heart's blood, giving up all—happiness, fortune, even life—for this tiny green blade and the honor of the old sod."

He came quite near her and asked the one ques-

tion in his mind. "Am I Irish enough for ye, acushla, gra machree?"

With a low laugh she turned. "You're a broth of a boy." And then, as he looked at her silently, she added very softly: "My broth of a boy!" and he took her in his arms.

And then they went up the hill together, just to become accustomed to their new found happiness and because newly engaged people, young and old, rich or poor, have whole volumes that must be said at once.

In the darkness and the mist they passed Lee. He was walking with his head down, for he had just seen the deserted Wilton home and it had saddened him. Besides, he was revolving deeply another matter which it had taken him weeks to formulate exactly. "If she won't have me one way," he said, "perhaps the other'll catch her."

He had halted in the roadway, nearly opposite the new chapel, under the single street lamp that the hill boasted. As he felt for his watch to see the time, someone spoke to him.

"My good little man"—the voice was high and modulated in tone. He turned and an exclamation burst from him.

"Bellows Falls," he cried.

The charmingly gowned lady who had spoken to him wore a large picture hat and in her hand was a gold lorgnette. As she raised it and studied him, Lee supplemented his first inventory: "Bellows Falls, Vermont, and she's got them all on."

"Is that you, Mr. Martin?"

He nodded. The transformation of the awk-

ward, slow-spoken country girl into this stylish woman had taken the power of speech from him momentarily.

Then she came nearer and motioned him to a seat beside her on a little rustic bench, placed there by wise old country officials who had not forgotten their vanished youth.

"You observe a change in me?" said Lesura.

Lee shook his head. "No, it isn't a change. Why, you're a Fourth of July parade and a presidential torch light procession, both coming down the same street. Say, you hurt my eyes just to look at you."

"And of course you want to know the reason," Lesura went on. "Well, father made some money; oh, a lot."

The old times came back to Lee and he wondered if her appreciation of humor had developed with her change in dress and manner. He put up his hand. "One moment, please. Did anyone see father—*when* he made it?"

Lesura looked at him and shook her head. "Why, no."

He nodded and bent nearer. In a moment more, when he had led her craftily up to the joke he planned, he would know if she really could laugh. "That's lucky for father," he said, wagging his head wisely.

"Why lucky, Mr. Martin?"

Ah, she had asked the exact question to make everything complete. "Because, listen now; I had a friend once who made a lot of money; yes, stacks, bales of it; why he sat up nights making it—but—they *saw him*."

He paused and surveyed her closely. Not a smile, not a ripple. No, she only stared blankly at him. Regretfully he turned to the phantom dog who, in his previous attempts on her sober face, had been his confidant. "Lie still, Rover," he said, sadly. "There's nothing doing, nobody laughing."

"You are such an odd fellow, Mr. Martin"; and she tapped him gently on the arm.

"I am," he returned. "There aren't any more clothes in the world like these I'm wearing; that's the reason I'm odd."

"So father sent me to school," Lesura concluded; "and I'm finished."

"You certainly do look it," he answered, and then, in sheer desperation, he went on rapidly: "But have you changed? Are you still there with that joke-defying stuff; that non-bending face; that sheet-iron map, warranted not to crack if you hit it with a hammer? Are you Greenland's icy mountains; are you?"

She stared at him a moment, then shook her head. "Now, don't be naughty, Mr. Martin!"

"Never," he replied, and then he tried again. "Why, pa says——"

"Pa who?" she asked innocently.

He drew a deep breath and leaned nearer on the bench. "Pa-snip—parsnip," he said clearly.

No effect followed, and he started to leap from the bench, to run, far, far down the roadway—when, yes, a smile. Were his eyes deceiving him? No, the smile grew and grew, and with it he saw dimples forming in her cheeks that he had never suspected existed there. Still it grew

—grew to a chuckle—low, clear, but plainly a chuckle. It was a low laugh now, but a rising one. It filled and swayed the early morning air. Her eyes were pools of honest, hearty merriment.

Lee rose from his seat and took off his black, flat-topped hat. "Bellows Falls wins," he said judicially, and then added, "They taught you to laugh when they finished you!"

"That's very, very funny," she said.

And then something rose in Lee's throat and held him fast. "Lesura, see the clothes I have on," he said. "I dressed this way because I didn't know that you'd changed, that you were finished; but now—now I'm going to take a chance. How strong am I with you? Could you, can you, give me your hand and say I do take thee, Lee—and—and mean it? Could you—oh, say, can you see by the dawn's early light—no, no—what I want to say is, could you?" He paused for breath and leaned down to his faithful imaginary dog. "Hold you breath," he said, "hold your breath, it will all be over soon."

Lesura scanned him for a long, long moment and then shook her head. "Lee," she said, "I could never marry a man who dressed like that."

He looked down at the black, ill-fitting, baggy suit. "You couldn't?"

"Never; you lack finish."

"Ah," he returned blithely, "you haven't seen my finish yet. Here is where it happens."

He put his hands on the rail of the low fence that ran just behind the bench, vaulted it, and she heard him crashing in the dense shrubbery beyond.

Almost before her startled senses could recover sufficiently to ask what his strange action might mean, he was back standing before her, and she stared even as he had done when he first saw her. For the black suit was gone, and in its place a stylish walking suit of the latest cut and pattern clothed him; on his head was a modish derby; a single stone glittered in his scarf; a light cane made circles in his hand.

"This is the finish," he said airily, "and if it'll help any, I'm partner in an auto garage that pulls down fifty a week straight money. And so I am going—going. Anybody want me—going—going——"

"I want you," she cried, and seized his arm with both her hands.

"Gone! he cried joyfully. "Gone, and glad to go! Come on, Rover!" and their voices blended in a laugh of pure happiness as they went down the hill together.



"At sunrise every soul is born again"

CHAPTER XX

THE VOICE FROM ABOVE.

IN the wet, rank grass that grew about the chapel steps, the man who had fallen there prone stirred feebly. The hand lying upon the lower step opened and closed, then he moaned.

In the eastern sky were the faint, gray traces of the dawn. A breeze that was hardly more than a gentle breath, came over the top of the hill and filtered softly down its slope into the little vale beneath. It sent the mist scurrying before it, with ragged detachments clinging here and there to the hillside, as though making a last stand before its attack. The man lying by the chapel step moaned again.

The sacristy door in the chapel's western wing was drawn open sharply. Father Kelly stepped out into the steel gray light of the approaching day.

"Kathleen," he said in his quiet way, "was that you who called to me?"

There was no answer save the gentle suspiration of the hilltop breeze.

He came forward a little, his pale, drawn face raised to the lightening sky. "Someone called me, I thought, or can it be only my fancy. Three days and three nights I've spent before the altar without bite or sup, praying for those I love, and now——" He folded his arms upon his breast and his haggard eyes looked over the little

cluster of houses across the marshes and the river, even beyond the eastern hills, where the sky showed the mystery of the new day that would soon dawn.

And then the priest's eyes dilated and he took a step forward, for he saw a white hand extended nervelessly upon the chapel step. Just for one moment he paused, doubting if he really saw a hand, or if his faculties were not deceiving him, worn as he was with his fast and vigil. But while he gazed the long, gaunt fingers opened and closed convulsively, the hand moved feebly, and he knew someone was lying there.

Yet he came towards the step slowly. Prayer and fasting, supplication and desire to aid the two people whom he loved had banished the physical man. It was pure spirit that looked through his eyes and spoke with his voice; his mind was alive, attuned to the unseen forces of the invisible world. And so, even before his eyes could make out clearly the form of the man lying there helpless, spent and alone, he—*knew!*

He paused erect above the crumpled form and his eyes closed, a low, deep whisper came from his lips and a smile of perfect faith lighted his white face.

"Father," he breathed, "Father, I thank thee. Thou hast brought him back to me, sin-sick and weary, broken and bruised, through the very flames of the pit, here to the foot of thy holy altar."

He moved nearer and, with the gentleness of a mother, put his hand upon the man's shoulder. "Bruce," he said very gently.

The man staggered to his feet and gazed about him. His reeling senses took in the hilltop, the village below, the river beyond, the towering spire of the chapel and the gold cross there, pointing heavenward. Dazed, weak, faltering, he took a step backward, caught at a low shrub for time to draw one steady breath——

"Bruce," said the priest.

Only a bemused shake of the head answered him. The man took a step toward the roadway and—the river.

Then the priest came forward and put up his hand. In his voice was a note of command, a tone before which the kings of the earth have trembled.

"Bruce Wilton!"

The man stopped as though an invisible force had met him. He turned and answered, "Yes!"

"Rouse yourself." The priest came nearer and laid his hand upon his friend's shoulder. "Speak to me! How came you here?"

"They—they were after me."

"They? Who?"

"Shapes of poisonous things that tried to seize me. They laughed and mocked at me. I was there, alone in a room and—and I—I saw on the wall the date, July 10. Then I—I——" He looked about him wildly, and with a smothered cry threw himself on his knees and clasped the priest's hand. "You won't let them take me. You won't—you won't——." His voice died away inarticulately.

Lovingly the father laid his hand upon the man's head, and his voice spoke low and soothingly.

The mist had abandoned the hillside. It was fleeing through the narrow streets of the village, hurrying across the broad river.

And along a narrow path, at the chapel's northerly end, a black gowned figure hurried. It paused, looked up at the towering cross of gold, and then stole softly to the sacristy door. A small hand pushed it gently open; the dark figure blended with the shadows inside the chapel and the door closed noiselessly.

"No harm shall come to you, lad," said Father Kelly softly. Then he bent lower to the stricken face of the man and looked steadily into his feverish eyes. "You know me, don't you. You know Father Kelly?"

Bruce rose to his feet. He was steady now. "Yes," he replied slowly. "You came to my house that night a—a year ago." He paused as the full force of the sweet recollection of that evening flooded him. "You asked a blessing on it, on us all."

"I did," the father answered steadily.

Bruce caught his breath painfully and he looked down at his torn and miry garments. "And this is the answer to your prayer." He laughed jarringly. "Isn't it funny, Father, that I, in rags and tatters, a bleeding, broken, beaten parody of a man, should come to you here—today——." His roving eyes fell on the chapel, clear and distinct now in the gray light, and something stirred in him strangely. He put his hands on the marble walls and moved along their length for a pace or two.

"Yes," spoke the priest calmly, "this is the chapel you built for me, Bruce, and at dawn it will be dedicated."

Bruce leaned back upon the wall, his hands loose at his sides. "We didn't think," he said at last slowly; "we didn't think that night that it would *end* like—like this!"

"This is not the end, lad." There was supreme conviction in the father's tone. "'Tis only the beginning of the lesson you must learn, that there is One Heavenly Father who loves us, guides us, rules us all, whose great heart of pity is torn with grief at our sins, who suffers for us, with us, and who in His own good time, in His omniscient wisdom will bring us all Home." The father's voice was like some mighty, throbbing tone of the ages, echoing down the aisles of time, breathing the True Faith that sways the world and all mankind.

He took a step nearer the man, and his voice was very tender as he asked, "Where is Vera?"

Bruce stiffened back on the wall. He threw both hands out before him. "Don't—don't speak her name. She brought me to this——."

"Stop!" commanded Father Kelly. "Not one word against her! There's no voice on earth good enough to speak of her."

"You—you believe in her, Father?"

"As I believe in my religion, as I hope for an hereafter where pain and suffering shall be no more!"

Bruce faltered. "If—if I could believe!"

"Ye shall!" There was surety in the father's tone. "The black cloud that's over you shall pass and the sunlight of belief in God's love shall flood your darkened soul." He laid his hand upon the man's shoulder. "Bruce, dear lad, what evil thing came to you that day?"

"I don't know." And Bruce looked up into his friend's eyes. Already he felt better, stronger; the mere presence of this man helped him.

Father Kelly shook his head. "And yet, 'twas there," he said slowly. "Try to think calmly, my boy, and answer me a few questions. Was there anyone who wished you harm?"

Bruce shook his head, as he dropped upon a carved marble seat, placed in the shadowed angle of the chapel. "No one, Father!"

"But think, lad, think hard now."

An auto glided smoothly down the roadway and stopped before the chapel. A man stepped from it and came across the level greensward toward them.

"Good morning, Father Kelly," he said easily.

The priest turned and took a step toward him. "Good day to you, Mr. Kenward Wright," he answered briefly.

Kenward looked at the priest a moment, then his gaze traveled to the huddled figure on the marble seat. "I've come for you, Bruce," he said kindly, and started toward his friend.

The priest laid his hand on Bruce's shoulder. "Wait a moment, please, Mr. Wright." He paused and looked at him directly. "You've come for my dear boy, Bruce, you say?"

Kenward drew him nearer with a look. "Yes, Father," he replied in a low tone. "I've had him examined by an expert and, on his advice, took him to a sanitarium today. Somehow he escaped and—well, he should go back there." He paused and added, "Bruce isn't quite right—you understand?"

Father Kelly shook his head. Busy with his own thoughts, he answered the question he had been asking himself all the year, instead of that one Kenward had put to him. "No," he replied softly; "no, but I'm hoping to fathom it."

His words puzzled Kenward. He gazed at him for a moment, and then looked toward the crumpled man upon the seat. "Come, Bruce," he said sharply.

As Bruce staggered to his feet the priest caught his hand. "You'll stay to the service, dear lad?"

Kenward struck in curtly, before Bruce could answer, "I would, by all means; you're dressed for it aren't you?"

"In the house of God, Mr. Wright," and there was a ring of steel in the father's tone; "it is not what you wear upon your back, but what your naked soul is in His eyes, that counts!" He turned to his friend and his voice trembled with an appeal. "You'll stay, Bruce?"

"No," cried the man, almost savagely. "No, I've tried to believe. All my life I've tried—and your God answers me by bringing me down to this—to the humiliation of poverty and rags."

High and clear rose the father's tone above his own. "Maybe 'tis only that you may rise a new and a better man." Imploringly he stretched out his hands, his voice quivered. "Bruce, dear, dear boy, come pray with me before yonder altar." Tenderly he sought to lead him toward the massive chapel doors.

"No!" Bruce freed himself roughly. "No, there are oaths in my heart, blasphemies on my lips."

The father gave a cry of pain as he put his hands over his eyes. "Don't, lad, you can't know what you're saying—don't, don't!"

But the man whose soul he fought for there in the gray of the coming dawn, held his clenched hands up to the growing light in the heavens and his tortured memory lashed him on. "I gave a rosary to the woman I loved," he cried; "a rosary of pearls. Each pearl was a prayer, a prayer from my soul that some power would change my heart and bring me to faith, belief."

"And that prayer will be answered, Bruce!"

"When, when? Must I sink still lower, sound the depths of more misery and despair?"

"The time may be now!" And in the father's eyes there was a strange light. "Kneel," he cried, and then his voice took a tone of command. "Kneel, I say!"

Bruce obeyed. He put his shaking hands to his face and tried to think.

Above him stood the father, his white face uplifted, his lips moving.

"Better let me take him away." It was Kenward's calm tones that broke the stillness; but Father Kelly did not seem to hear. "Bruce," he murmured, "my boy, Bruce, once so full of life and joy, now fallen to this. It is as though some evil power held him."

Kenward smiled. "That isn't possible," he said.

"And I know it is," came the priest's tone. "Since the day man first thought of evil it has had its power. An evil thought holds my poor lad now; but God in his mercy can change that. He can restore him."

"You believe in miracles, then?"

"Who doubts them? Don't they happen about us every day? Ask the young mother whose soul goes down to the very gates of Death that her smiling babe may lie in her arms. Isn't that a miracle? God working through Nature for all mankind."

"Then work a miracle for him now!" Kenward's tone had a half sneer behind it. "Prove to him that his wife, Vera, is true; that she came down from her room that night, not to meet a man, but for her sister."

But the priest did not turn to him. His eyes were fixed on the slowly growing light in the heavens. "That's what I'm praying for now," he said slowly.

Kenward smiled and came nearer. "Prove to him that the rosary he gave Vera is stainless." He paused for breath. "Speak the name of the man who came to his house that night!"

The dawn was creeping up over the eastern sky; the light was changing from a grayish steel to a warmer hue; faint streaks of color shot above the horizon like golden sword thrusts.

But the man who knelt saw nothing of this; his mind was set upon one idea—to—to—get away—the—river. It flowed, darkly, swiftly, there at the foot of the hill. One longing filled him—to steal down there and lay himself to rest—sleep, oblivion in those silent, hurrying waters.

With a crash the bell of the chapel rung one sororous note. It filled earth and air and sky with its reverberations. The cool morning air shook with the tone, carried it down through the village, across the river, over the eastern hills.

Bruce staggered to his feet. He put out his hand to his friend and smiled as one who has done with life. "Good bye, Father," he said thickly.

"Wait, Bruce, wait!" said the father softly. He stood upon the marble steps, his black figure thrown in clear relief against the massive doors behind him, his hands were uplifted, his pale face questioned the reddening heavens with closed eyes. Earth seemed to have fallen away before him, the mighty power of his soul energy was drawn to one point—this trial of his faith.

Slowly came the words from his lips. "Father above—look down—your promise—ask and—ye *shall* receive. Ask——"

Again the thunder of the chapel bell shook the air—and then, high and clear and sweet, like the voice of a spirit from above, there thrilled from the chapel the sound of the great organ, played by the fingers of Love.

Kenward started and a strange look came over his face.

The man half way to the roadway and the river, with the awful thought of self-destruction in his mind, stopped. The hard lines melted from his face; he smiled and put up his hand, for the organ's voice throbbed with the tones of an air he knew. "'The Rosary,' he whispered.

"Come, Bruce." It was Kenward's sharp tone.

But before he could speak or move, it came—the answer to the father's fasting and vigil. Clear and high the priest heard it, felt it ring through the depths of his being.

"Stand where you are!" he cried, with his hand



"It comes from Above"

upflung, and there was majesty in his look and bearing, a new and wonderful light upon his face. "Stand where you are! The man who came to your house that night, Bruce Wilton, the man who has brought you to this is *you*, KENWARD WRIGHT," and his hand pointed and drove home the words.

With a cry, Kenward started forward. "How do you know that?" he screamed hoarsely.

"It comes from above," thundered the voice of the Holy Priest. His eyes opened wide and tore through the man he faced, brought him with a cry down upon his face, groveling at the feet of the black-robed figure that towered above him.

From over the hill a shaft of golden sunlight, advance guard of the rising sun, fell full upon the father. Behind them the chapel doors opened silently and Vera stood there, a great hope in her eyes.

"Speak, Kenward Wright," said the priest solemnly. "Speak, confess. 'The soul that sinneth it shall die.' Only by repentance, confession, penance, can you ever find peace. Speak!"

"It's—it's true," gasped the sin-tortured man at his feet. "All, all true. I hated you, Bruce, because Vera loved you——"

"Kenward!" gasped Bruce; you——"

The other shook his head. Yes, he would tell all. Remorse had dogged him ever since that night. Always at his elbow he heard Alice's pleading voice, felt the touch of her hand; why, she was there now. He drew his hand over his writhing face and went on desperately: "I meant to take all from you. Alice showed me the way.

When you and Vera went to—to the library that night—Alice came in from the grounds. She—she knew I was there. I had met her—West;—lied to her, deceived her—given her another name—and—well, I saw I must get her away. I made an—an excuse— got away—came back for her. Alice had listened at your door—when you told Vera about your plan—in Iowa Central. She let it drop to me. She—she—was half mad—and—I saw my chance. Then Vera came—and Alice—went. I couldn't find her. Well—you know the rest—I ruined you—but the money is there—you shall have it back—for—I—did—it—I—I——” His voice died away and he drooped forward, his hands over his face.

And then Bruce felt a light hand upon his arm. Vera was standing there, her eyes full of longing for him, the man who had doubted her, the man—— With a cry he dropped on his knees and raised the hem of her poor, shabby skirt to his lips. “My wife,” he said brokenly. “Forgive me!”

She raised him with her loving hands, and put her arms about his neck, drew his worn and weary face down upon her breast and hushed him gently. “I love you, Bruce, I love you!”

Up from the village came the sound of low voices, as the people came in answer to the call of the chapel bell. And in the lead came Lee and Lesura, while Charley and Kathleen descended the hill. They paused as they saw the silent figures on the greensward before the chapel, and their voices were hushed.

Father Kelly raised his hand and pointed.

"The sacred doors of His house are open," he said gently.

Bruce took his hand and his eyes were upraised to the glowing heavens. "I do believe," he said solemnly. "I believe, help Thou, my unbelief!"

The priest, with a glad cry, caught him in his arms. "Bruce!" he said.

But the man upon the earth put up his hands with a cry as they turned toward the chapel. "Father," he cried, "don't, don't leave me. I'm suffering, suffering. The evil I have done grips me, will not let me go! Pity me, Father, and help me."

With a divine look upon his face, Father Kelly bent over Kenward. "Pity you? I do," he said. "Help you? Yes. The church seeks justice, not revenge. Look up, my son; see how the dawn is breaking. 'At sunrise every soul is born again.' And so I say to you, as my Master said of old, 'Go, and sin no more.'"

And so, with the joy of Divine love in their hearts, they went over the dewy grass, through the crimson glory of the dawn, up the broad marble steps into the Chapel of the Rosary.

Father Kelly followed those he loved slowly. He stood alone upon the marble steps and gazed at the peaceful valley; at the river winding its shining course to the sea; the trees, flowers, shrubs, waving in the cool morning breeze. He listened to the happy song of the birds, and a great wave of thankfulness filled his soul and shone from his eyes.

"Father," he murmured softly; "Father, I thank Thee."

